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NELLY HAMILTON.

VOL. II.

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BY

SHELSLEY BEAUCHAMP,

AUTHOR OF

"GRANTLEY GRANGE."

"Trust not appearances. Good often is
Where evil seems to be."

In Three Volumes.

VOL. II.

BODLEIANA BIBLIOTHECA

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NELLY HAMILTON.

CHAPTER I.

A WEDDING-PEAL FOR LITTLE JENNY WOOD.

THE snow had vanished with the strong March winds; the first spring month was come, the month of April; that month of woodland flowers and leafing trees, of fitful gleams and brief refreshing showers—the month so loved by children in the country.

How the youngsters hunt about the hedge-rows, and scout then in the coppices,

searching for primroses, white wood-anemones and violets; and what a chatter they make when they come upon them! How their rippling laughter thrills through you, and how joyous and young again you feel as you listen to their merry shouts, as each one tells of some fresh find in flowers! There is something very cheering in that gladsome sound of child voices! A man is none the worse for listening to it, if at least there is any freshness of heart left in him; for its very joyousness is contagious, and the sight of the children a pleasure, as they come trooping along the lanes laden with wild flowers, and the little toddlers of the company are half hidden by the green boughs they carry.

April is a month of greenery. How you can see it pushing out day by day, and how beautiful it is when branches change to boughs, and soft greens thicken, and you

hear around you the sound of young lambs and the songs of birds!

It is beautiful too to see, as storms are coming, that sway the mowing-grass and shake the clovers, those broad cloud-shadows sweep across the fields, that make such glorious breadths of light and shade. And pleasant is it, too, to wait and shelter till those storms pass; to hear the rain pit-patter on the leaves, and watch the glistening pearl-drops as it ceases, and smell the freshness that comes close upon it, as cattle stir again, and grasses glitter; and see, as we move on and clouds pass over, blue sky on high, and larks there, gaily singing.

But should we also become as children, and turn into the woods for a ramble, on one of those nice fresh April mornings, to search for primrose-tufts and sweet white violets, we shall find a beauty even in the

thinness of the greenery that those woods are wearing; for we shall see then, that which, with fuller foliage, is all but hidden—soft pearly greys, grey-greens, and browns, on old oak trunks and boughs; the purply-red of the tree stems, and the crimsons, and the lighter reds of the bushes and the brambles; the dark festoons of ivy, deep greens of hollies, the peeps of distance, and the far-off hills. Sweeps, too, of matted blue from hyacinths, long trails of briony, and, where the moss lies moist, swift springing ferns.

And as we wander on through the chequered paths, now dark, now sunny, picking here a flower and there a flower, as the birds, flitting about from spray to spray, shake down the rain-drops, farm sounds will come up to us; a noisy cackling and a clank of gates, a neigh, a lowing, and a tiny bleat; the sound of workmen and

the bark of dogs, quick tinkling gears and the crack of whips, where teams are ploughing down the hops in hop-yards; for the winter is over and the spring has come—the ivy and holly are removed, the misletoe left up, and the yule brand has been lit and quenched; the yew is in the churches, and the palms are gathered.

The signs, too, that the spring has come, are now as marked in Eymor as in most places; for the little gardens on the common that are amongst the gorse and the broom bushes, and the little plots in the village that are between the hawthorns and the sweet-briars, are gay alike with bright and blended colour; the rose of the almond and the white of the plum and the blackthorn; the pink of the flowering currant, and the snowy green-tipped branches of the cherry; and the pear trees are bunched with bloom, and the apple trees are budding, and there is a

rich sweet smell of gillies in the air. Leaves are expanding, and buds are swelling, and a purply tint is spreading through the woods; thrushes are in the trees, and blackbirds are in the shrubberies; the cuckoo is crying, the rooks are cawing, and birds are building. Gnats are busy in the sun, bees are humming by their hives, and early swallows are twittering on the eaves. There are cowslips in the fields, primroses in the hedges, and yellow daffodils round the draw-wells by the cottages; and meadow, wood, and copse are filled with flowers.

The woodcocks have vanished, ladycows have come, partridges have paired, and the shooting is over; and the hunting also, for the hares and the foxes are at peace again, and the first nightingale has been heard in the Green Valley. The ferns are unfolding, and the furze is in blossom, and leaves are showing on the beeches in the Church lane

and on the wych elms by the spring at the cross-roads; and young Tom Pritchett—whose lamb will follow him—has chased a butterfly, and seen the pewits, and heard a corncrake, and exults accordingly.

Aaron, the mole man, is amongst his traps again, for the earth-stopping is over; and he has looked up his plots in the woods for plants, his nooks for wild flowers, and put aside some fossils at the quarry; for he has seen an adder, and can give a good account of the frogs, so expects his friends, and Rebecca is preparing; for the doves are cooing in the woods, and the bats are skimming, and the Easter Monday folks have come and gone. Jem, the fisherman, has done with the lamperns in the Severn and commeneed with the eels in the Teme, so is now on the spot to work in with Aaron; and he will be ready in a week hence, for the trout in the brooks, though

truth to tell, "May-day" with him comes always very early. Moss, the keeper, is speculating on early broods, and on the propriety of looking round in a week or two for pheasants' eggs; and Mary is busy amongst her poultry, and is thinking of gipsy parties.

Eleazer Gould and Peter Butler, and Jacob and Ebenezer, are bird-tending, busy with the clappers by the wheat; and the rooks are being scared with their hand work and their noise; and Austin, Jack Smith, and Whittaker, are screeching at the Fox Farm; and Paul, and Tim, and young Tom, have been sent for "strap oil" and "pigeon's milk," and thus made fools of, as they are each April. Pigeons are fluttering, and chickens are cheeping, and young ducks and gulls, like little balls of wool, are taking to the water, the shell scarce off their backs.

The cross-work cake at the shop has been exchanged for another one, to keep Mrs. Haden from fire till the next Good Friday, and she has sewn her stocks at sunset, that they may all come double. Byfield has grated a fresh bun, as another fair start against the colic, the crumbs of the last one in his pocket having decidedly relieved him; and his daffy son Amoz, has begged a sacrament shilling from the parson, wherewith to make a ring, to cure his fits. Bridget, the Irish girl, who lives at the Poplars, has been up on Easter Sunday at four o'clock, "to see the sun dance," for she still has her bun, and she is not married yet, though the date was marked with pins, and the bun put by "se-cretely;" and she has heaved her man on the Monday, and the careless girl at the inn—Sheba Tunstall—has also been heaved on the Tuesday, that her destructive habits in breaking the crockery

may be put a stop to; and by the general heaving of the men by the women on Easter Monday, and the return of the compliment by the men on the Tuesday, all over the parish good-humour prevails, for they are conscious they have done their duty.

Not a custom has, so far, been forgotten, and they are now looking forward—the young chits at least, and all the servant girls—to the next on their list, which is "St. Mark's Eve," the twenty-fifth of April; when they really do hope, by dumb-cakes, salt eggs, or waiting in the church-porch, that something will at last come of it; for they have waited a long while, and there are likely young fellows in the parish. The girls at the Rectory especially, hope to slip out and try the church-porch, for they are plain-looking ones; and, failing that, the egg—eat the yolk in silence, and then fill the egg with salt, and wait events between then

and the morning—but the girls at Eymor House, who are very passable, mean to go in for the cake; three of them, that is, Mary and Emma, and Jane—it will only do for three, so Betsy is out of it—and they trust by meeting together in silence, making it, and each breaking their bit off as the clock strikes twelve, and going then to bed backwards, still keeping silence, that they shall, before the morning, "see their sweethearts," or at least, hear "the rap at the door." The test, they have heard, is certain, and it ought to answer with them, or at least with Jane, who knows that she is pretty. Betsy, however, who will have to do salt egg, because three would do, and four would not, means to cry "fire" as they go up the stairs, and so spoil the spell by making one of them call out; which, considering the comfort it might be, if the spell answered, is, to say the least of it, a most reprehensible intention on the

part of the scullery-girl, as there can be no remedy for it till the time comes round again. It is too bad certainly, as two in the parish are already spell-bound, and she knows it; a brother of Turner, who has seen the first lamb with its tail to him, and a helper in the stables at the "Arms," who has killed a ladycow.

The twenty-fifth is, however, being looked forward to anxiously, as with all the marriageable young girls, it is the chief day of the year; and this year they are more hopeful than ever they were, for a wedding—the best of omens—will take place in the village on that day; for as the flowers are springing, and the birds are singing, and green is everywhere, the day is fixed for little Jenny Wood to change her name to Mrs. Warrilow. Mrs. Wood has put off and put off, but as her little dark-eyed, dark-haired, rosy-faced daughter has persisted in saying "but I shall

be only over the way, mother, and we can see each other daily," her mother at last has consented; so Jenny has fixed the day, and it is now but three days to it.

As a wedding in Eymor is an event, it must be celebrated; and as little Miss Wood is a favourite, and Warrilow too, the people all say "justice" must be done it; so flags are being extemporised with cheap stuffs and calico, garlands are being planned and wreaths thought of. There is to be an arch over the roadway, from the shop, and another at the church gate; a third by the blacksmith's, and a fourth by the turnpike, at the entrance to the village; while Purdey's people, to outdo the cottagers, have hired an Union Jack and mean to fly it. But the greatest efforts in the way of decoration are to be at the Eymor Arms, where Mr. and Mrs. Dunniman, and their niece, Rose Hemming, have been busy for a long time; and from the entrance to

the Bridge lane there is to be an arched roadway of wreaths to the miller's.

At last the day is come—the twenty-fifth; and by a general arrangement it is to be observed as a complete holiday; for besides the large party at the mill, there is to be a still larger gathering in the mill meadow, where tents have been erected; one for the dinner and the tea drinking and another for the dancing, and a band "of music," they say, is really coming; and there are to be races, games, and "a ball;" the latter they are sure of, for band or no, the fiddlers are engaged, old Jem being one of them—Jem Webb, the fisherman, who plays at the gipsy parties—and a brother of Aaron the other—"Charley" Woodruff, who lives on Bromyard Down, a smart young fellow, who has plenty to say for himself, and who plays such tunes that legs and feet are bound to go to it, tired or

not. His pony, too, will run in the races, and so will Jem's donkey.

It is a stirring day for Eymor. The children are back from the woods, the flowers are ready to be strewn, and a crowd is already collected to wait the coming of the bridal party. The church is full, and so is the churchyard; and there is a crowd of lads on the mounting-block, and a great chatteration and a confusion of tongues all down the village. The women from the common are there, and so are the men; and the hop-yard and the quarry people, and those from the wood; and there is a great influx of their friends from the neighbouring places.

The excitement at length increases. The parson has arrived, and the ringers are in their places; and a tiptoeing, as a carriage drives up, gives them a sight of the bridegroom, and his "best man," Gilbert. Another

tap tap on the road, and the carriages are there, with a pair of grey horses to each of them; and as they set down at the church gate, under the wreaths and the evergreens, the comments of the crowd are complimentary and audible.

"Bless hur art," says Sapphira, "but hur do look lovely!" "An so does him," says Jane Smith, in reply. "An aint the bridesmaids pratty, neither?" "An yer youngsters gotten the primeroses an things ready?" asks Mrs. Gould, while waiting by the porch. "Is, us han," say the juveniles in petticoats, who are ranging themselves in line for the distribution. "A proud daay fur Jaabez, a thinks; a werry proud daay," says Betsy Potts. "A belave yer," is Mrs. Roberts's response. "Yer saays true, true as the boible," remarks Sarah Turner, "an our men be agwain to putt theer strength to it. Uz a monied mon, an hur bin a noice

un; an so's Muster Eddut, so theyn pug the ropes a good un."

"By gom, it be done then, it be over!" says the mole-man, as the bells clash. "Isaac an the parson ha' strungd em hup; theyn settled 'em." "Here, stand asoide now," says Austin, "an gie 'em room." "An yer lads hoot, moind yer, as hur comes," says Jones; "hur bin worthy on it," is his remark to Davis. "Hur be, and so be he, an so be Jaabez," says Alice Hill to Mrs. Raybould. "Here they are then! Hats off, and a good un," says old Tom Norton. "An a gooder un arter that, ma boys," cries old Morton, who was there with Mary. "Thy Prissie 'll be thun next un," says Mrs. Everill, wishing to flatter her. "A thinks a ool," says she, "fur Willum be keen, an a manes it."

"Now, lads, theym here," says Peter Bell, the road-man; "hoff ooth yer caps, an a good un; an attend to Tummus." And as

the wedding party comes out of the church, the people, taking the time from Norton, give ample proof of healthy lungs in Eymor. "Well, God bless 'em!" says Baylis; "an now ween goo in fur the wittles. Bif an taturs, Shepherd." "Is, an hot uns," says Wainwright, "an a power o' drink, too. Coome on an pick yer sate, the band be comin." The band had already come, however, but they were just then playing up by the Bridge lane, big drum and all, as a welcome to "the weddiners;" but they presently have to be silenced, as the horses are restive.

The party at the mill is a large one, for Jabez Wood is liked; so all have accepted but the Misses Minchem, though their brother is there, because he is Wood's tenant; but as he is of course the wet blanket of the party, they are none of them sorry when he leaves again, which he does after dinner, for the "breakfast" was had before going to church;

Wood, the Miller, being an old-fashioned fellow, who likes to call things by their right names; and as he means making an afternoon of it, with dessert and wine, he says, "dinner at one, sharp;" so "dinner" it is, and a good one, and they make merry afterwards. Nelly is there, and so is Frank, and their father and mother too; and young Bob, who has been fetched home from school for the occasion, is to come down with his sister Laura in the afternoon, to hear the band and to see the games. But Bob has been in secret conference with the blacksmith, and he has certain ideas on the events of the day, which are only known to the pair of them.

CHAPTER II.

THE GALLANT STEEDS—BOB HAMILTON THE WINNER.

THE dinner to the villagers is a success. The clerk takes the chair, and old Tom Norton faces him; and the quick way in which the good things are dispatched is a sight to see, "them maly taturs" having a short time of it—for there are more than a hundred at it, and all sharp-set. As for the lads, every button is tight, or rather had been tight, for there was an unfastening and a slackening when the big puddings came in, so bent are they on doing justice to them; and at the

close of dinner it needs the united efforts of their respective parents to keep them within bounds, for the cider is good, and there is plenty of it. "Now you lads, be orderly," says Norton, "and let those jugs be; remember, those who can stick on best will win the race; and mind you," says he, "we've got some kickers, and no mistake, as 'll show good sport. Mrs. Gould, see to your lads, will you; they've got a jug under the table; and Mrs. Austin, if you'll take that cup from your son Nat, I think you'll be doing him a service. Steady now, boys, and don't disgrace yourselves, for all eyes will be on you at the races."

"Now," says Jem, the fisherman, as Abraham and his lot, Roberts, Potts, and Turner, Burton, and Byfield, get up to go off again to the belfry, to give the bride a peal, "look aloive, ool yer? Theym a gittin ready fur the start, an thun osses

be harnished; so look the shoes hup;" and sundry pairs and odd ones are at once produced from jacket pockets, and given to the women. "An look yer here," says Aaron, "yer women moind how yer throus 'em, an dunna thee hit 'em o' theer yuds. Theer shouders be lucky, an the smorl o' the back be lucky; but ef theer chilthren am to be borned straight limd, an roight an proper, cotch 'em hardish loike o' the roight arm, an thun naape o' thun neck; thin youn see the young uns 'll grow up a blessin to 'em. Git 'em ready, for I hears thun osses." So there is a general break-up at the tables, and a move made to the road; and followed by a shower of old shoes, which it is to be hoped hit the right places, Mr. and Mrs. Warrilow drive away under the flowers, and over the bridge for Worcester, to catch the train for London.

The villagers then distribute themselves;

the men to the tent to see what cans want emptying, and the women for a gossip; and the youngsters for a scamper, and to listen to the band, until the time comes for the pony and the donkey races, which are fixed for three o'clock or near it, and it wants but twenty minutes to it; tea at five, and then all sorts of games till dark; and a dance for the finish.

"An how be you, to-daay?" says a fresh comer from the next parish—Mrs. Prosser to Mrs. Butler, as she and her neighbours sit under the trees. "Purty well, an thank yer," says Mary, "an weller for the wittles; they wan mortal good, an proime taturs, that's sure, an the best o' graavy." "They wan," says Anne decisively. "An houm the work bin ooth yer laaitely? It oon bin scaarce ooth we o' our soide thun hill; an houm thun hops?" "O toidy, toidy loike," replies Mrs. Butler, "ween han some hops,

that flood it gooded 'em, though 'twan a mess, sure-ly. It gid us work though, me an Liza here." "It did," says Badsey's wife. "An fur sum toime too," says Mrs. Lewis. "Is, ther'll be some hops, a think," continues Mary, "an weem gittin on ooth 'em too—theyn bin ploughed-down, throud down, kerft, an cut, an ween toied em fur the fust toime; an ween ha another toying at em immajutly, theer now; but weem short o' rushes—theym scaarce. Howsumbe howivir our meyster a dunna lose not no toime, he don't, niver." "That be roight enough, Mary," says Liza, "fur Ine heerd Muster Shepherd an Wainwright a saayin as how they'd slipt into the threshin, an thun hedgin a good un, an got it out un hand; an as Willum an they an the young meyster had gotten the ploughin over, an the whate in, an thun oats." "An the banes, an the barley," says Mrs. Lewis; "an the mangols

they be busy ooth; so a dunna think as yer con be forrider, Anne, nor we, o' your soide thun hill." "Nor so forrard, by a dale," says Mrs. Prosser, "an we waants rushes, too. Mayhap an mebbee ween han to put up ooth split seg or roy; but us gits good money, so a munna grumble."

"Lor! Mis-ter Norton, an houd yer do? A hanna sid you fur a power o' daays; lets shaake thee fist; how bin yer?" "Oh, very well, very well, Mrs. Prosser, and all the better for the sight of your face. I like a rosy woman." "Lor, Mis-ter Norton, how-ivir an it possible, con yer; youm as bad as ivir?" "Worse, worse a deal," says he, "for the girls won't let me be; they're wild to marry me!" "Yes," says Isaac Walker, as he came up to them, "me and the parson will have to put the couples on you, Tom, some day soon, I'm thinkin. Where's Bur-ton; are they back from the belfry?" "Only

now just. He's gone with Byfield and Jem for the donkeys. We shan't be ready now till half-past three." "Is Moss here? he didn't show at dinner." "He is, and Mary too, and she is engaged to me for the first dance, the little darlin; so hands off," says Norton. "An theest hev Gaarge Lawson aboot tha ef thee dost," says Mrs. Badsey, "though ahanna bin hup that awaay so much laaitly, sense thun oud mon went quare." "Bother George," says Norton, "she'll have me instead. And after her I dance with Patty Haden, and when she's tired, I start with Lina Morris." "Thin Charles 'll cut thee throat," says Mrs. Lewis. "And then," says Norton, heedless of her say, "I go in for the polka with Miss Rose, the barmaid at the 'Arms;' and after her I have a dance with Prissie." "Oh, what a Blue Beard!" is the exclamation; "yer ought to gie we married folks a turn." "With pleasure, Mrs. Badsey,

I'll dance with each of you; but these young girls, you see, they do so set me. I can but marry one, and yet each wants me."

"Tom!" cries Burton, "dunna thee gammon they women, but come along, old fellow, ween gotten 'em. Wheer bin the lads? it be welly harf arter." "I' the fild a waaitin," says Mrs. Butler; "our three—Ebenezer, Eleazer, an Jaacob, an the two Goulds — Paul an Peter." "Theym alang ooth the tothers," says Mrs. Hill; "young Jack Smith an Dick Whittaker." "An Nat Austin," says Mrs. Raybould, "an young Tom Pritchett." "Tom's agwain ta roide fur wun, a knows," says Mrs. Hill. So a move in that direction is at once made by all the party.

"Clear the course! clear the course!" says Moss the keeper. "Make a line, Aaron; come, help him, Jem."

"Now then," says he, as there is a straight

look up, and Jem and Aaron come back again. "Are we ready? Bring out the gallant steeds!" and Burton, Byfield, and Jem, Aaron and Abraham, come forth with the neddies from the old shed at the end.

"Two to one on Royal George," cries the fisherman, as he tickles him up to animate him. "A penny to a hapenny; a fourpenny bit to tuppence." "Uz o' no use whatever," says the blacksmith, "let them as haves the hapence bet on Jenny. Here a is, an a beauty. Kickin Jenny! fippence to thrippence uz the winner." "Dunna belave him," says the pig-killer, "this here uns the hanimal, Jehosophat; five farthins to two a comes in." "Nothin o' the sort," says the head-ringer, "this noble moke 'll lick the lot—come hup Neddy! his name's Je-rusalem, an 'll back im; uz a good un—four to three now in hapence on 'm, an as maany toimes as yer loike." "Ull back this un agin 'm," says

the mole man, "uz a proper un, an con goo a good un, an wi'out quiltin. Who spakes fust fur the Teme-side goer? A silver sixpence to thrippence on 'm. Look at his ears, an twig his taayl. Theers breed an broughtins up! — kim hup yer varmint — an haction! genlemen orl, haction! Bet agin 'm ef yer dar now; uz the winner."

"Davis, sort the lads," says Norton, "two up on each, and each throw off a stop; and no mountin while they're runnin. Both to be on at the finish or no race. Five shillins to the winner, and half-a-crown for the second. Now do your best, my boys, for the honour o' old Eymor, and say when you're ready."

So the lads, assisted by Charles Davis, sort themselves and mount, several coming off at once in the process, from the pricking of the animals. "Now Tom," says Charles, "where's your butty, my lad?" "A inna coome,"—

it was young Jack, from Gilbert's "Then we must have Tim Benbow"—the lad whose sister was so ill. "A oona mount," says Tom. "Then Jenny's out o' the race," says Davis, "for we must have two up." "Houd thee hard a bit," says Burton, "a on't ha' that; uz saafe to win. Ul foind a butty;" and in a few minutes back comes the blacksmith with Master Bob, who is there amongst them all, to see the race—and also to take part in it, should he get the chance of it; and before those present have time to recover from their astonishment, Bob is mounted, with young Tom behind him, and the word is given to "go!"; the distance being there and back again, from one side the field to the other.

The noise that is made by the rattle of hats, the shouts of the lads, and the cries of the women, is enough to astonish any donkeys, so the pace is good; but before

they reach the top Jehosophat is done for; his riders, Peter and Paul Gould being thrown repeatedly, which destroys their chance; the animal having to be caught each time, and brought back again to be mounted. Dick Whittaker and Austin, too, fare badly, for they are on a strong kicker; still, Royal George is in the betting, for he is a good one, and they are quick in mounting; and he turns for home with the Teme-side one; Jenny and Jerusalem leading, but Jenny is first.

On come the four, with heads down and heels in the air, and the riders bobbing and bumping; the friends of the respective animals shouting forth their backings of "fippence to thrippence," "five farthins to a penny," "three hapence to a hapeny" and other extravagant odds; but before Ebenezer and Eleazer on Jerusalem can come up for tumbles, Jack Smith and Jacob swipe their animal and make

a spurt for the finish; but Kicking Jenny, who has not belied her name, draws away from him, and by a good three lengths is landed the winner by Bob, amidst the cheers of the multitude; the Teme-side one being second, and Jerusalem a bad third; George and Jehosophat nowhere.

"There," says Bob, as he and Tom slide off, "I've stuck Jenny, and I'll stick any pony you'll let me ride," for he knew his father and the rest of them were safe. "Bravo! youngster; he's a chip o' the old block, bless him, and he shall ride," says Tom Norton; "my lad shall give up to him."

So when the ponies are brought, after considerable delay, as one of them got loose, Bob is put up; and he not only does stick her—the very one they had a scamper for—but after exhibiting decided symptoms of jockeyship, he comes in the winner, "Little Alice" beating the two others by several lengths.

The race was to have been "heats," but as time pressed, and tea was nearly ready, "once round" the meadow was decided on. The people's enthusiasm knows no bounds; and such is the uproar that the whole party at the mill come out upon the lawn, to see what it is all about; and the sight they see is Master Bob Hamilton being carried round in procession, on the shoulders of Moss the keeper and Burton the blacksmith, with the band at the head of them!

"Oh! the disgraceful boy," says Nelly; and "whatever will become of him," echoes the mother, as Bob exultingly waves his cap to them and laughs, while the people cheer him lustily. "The young scamp," says Frank, "I thought I missed him." But says the father, "Well done Bob!" and Bob's reward is sundry bits of silver from friends and visitors. "That's muscle,

Jabez, muscle; pluck and muscle. I know that Kicking Jenny," says his father, "he never could have stuck her but for muscle. Now mind! that lad will ride." And Bob rose in his father's estimation.

Tea soon followed, presided over by Mr. and Mrs. Dunniman, their niece Rose, Mary Moss, and Mr. and Mrs. Wallace from the school-house, and it passed off famously. After tea, the band played again, and games commenced: foot races, jumping, jigging, and knock-em-downs; swarming the pole for the men, for a pound of tobacco; and a sixty yards' race for the women, with three prizes —first, second, and third; the stuff dress being won by Betsy Potts, the print dress by Sarah Turner, and the half pound of tea by Jane Smith — nine starters and a good race; and Aaron won the tobacco, for he was a good bird's-nester, and great at climbing; Jem, the fisherman, being out of it

through sanding his trousers, to make him stick.

Dancing on the turf was then started to the music of the band, while the tents were lit up and got ready for "the ball;" and when Jem, "the fiddler" as he was now called, and Charley Woodruff had comforted themselves with some "cy-der," and got their fiddles in order, the band went back to Worcester, and the ball commenced.

Jem Webb, whose face was like a dented crab apple, made as many mouths over it as usual, his one eye being directed to the dancers and the other to the ceiling—Jem being able to look two ways at once when he wished to. Aaron was by him, and as his old slouched hat and rusty jacket—that he wore with his mole-traps — had been exchanged for sharp-looking ones, and his clayed knee-breeches, gaiters, and hob-nails, for fitting accompaniments to the coat, his

own mother—had she been living—would not have known him, now that he was "claned up a good un;" and winning the tobacco—he was a rare old smoker—had so sharpened him, that he had now a word for every one; while his brother, who was a smart young fellow, with a "posy" in his button-hole, kept time with his toe to the step, laughed at the women, talked to the girls, and made old Jem join him in the merriest tunes "to be heerd o' this soide Lunnun."

It was hard to say which had the best of it—Norton, old Joe, or Charles Davis, they were each in such request. In the matter of steps, Davis perhaps; in the matter of satisfaction to respective partners, Norton undoubtedly; but as regards good intentions to do his best in that state of life to which he was then called, the palm must be awarded to old Joe Bennett; of whom Hannah

Pippitt had good cause to be proud, as he led her—oftener than any of the others—down the middle and up again. The belle of the ball was "our Mary"—Mary Moss—for grace and prettiness; and the next best were Miss Rose, from the "Arms," and Miss Patty, from the shop.

The whole thing went off capitally, for the drink was judiciously distributed, and the lads were kept in order—all but one at least, and that was Bob, but then he never was. He had got off again from the house, and come down to the tent after supper; and when Frank, who was commissioned to seek him, came there and found him, the youngster was in the agonies of a polka with young Polly Everill, and the centre of an admiring crowd! So he was had out immediately, and he had his ears boxed, and was sent back to school the next morning.

The people did not separate till long past midnight, for as they were "to go at it as long as they liked," they did so; the fiddlers, Jem and Charles, sticking to it manfully. At last, when the clock struck three, and the owls were beginning to be quieter, a move was made; and those in the village who were already asleep, were roused up by the songs and the merriment of the late stayers, who long remembered the jolly time they had of it in the mill meadow, when Jenny Wood was married.

CHAPTER III.

MAY IN THE MEADOWS—THE OTTER HUNT.

THREE weeks had elapsed since the wedding, and the dance and the games and the races having been duly discussed, the village had again settled to its usual quietude. Mrs. Everill, "for the look of the thing with the mayster," had scolded her daughter for her "imperance" in dancing with "the young squire;" the fisherman had been chaffed at the cider shop for the sanding; the respective damsels had been congratulated on the admiration they had obtained; and Master Bob Hamilton had been taken to task,

and threatened with "boarding altogether," if he did not mend his manners, and that quickly.

The women had finished their second tying in the hop-yards; bean-hoeing was going on, and the mangolds were in; and farm work generally was forward, for the weather had been fine. The ring of the axe had been heard, and the trees had come crashing, and the rich odour of the felled ones was rising in the woods; the men were rounding the timber, the women and the children were busy with the peeling-irons, barking and ranking, and the young toddlers were gathering the chips. The cattle were turned out in the rich pastures, for cheese-making was at hand; the honey-bees were about to swarm, the cockchafer had come, the swifts had arrived, and the swallows and martens were building. The song of the missel-thrush was lessening,

the pheasants were laying, and the mulberry was leafing, and a few glow-worms had been seen. The east winds of the earlier part of the month were giving place to warm south-west ones, and the flies were troubling the horses.

Greens were thickening, and cottage gardens were colouring, and the meadows were yellowing with their cowslips and buttercups. The hedgerows were whitened with hawthorn, and creamed with elder-bloom, and a sweet blush of rosy blossom was in the orchards. The banks were massed with wild flowers, and the woods were full of them; young rooks had been seen, and young rabbits had been captured, and the nightingales were each evening in full song in the copses.

The servants at the Rectory had been disappointed, for the Rector had a party, so they could not get out to the porch, and

all the eggs were wanted; and the girls at Mr. Hamilton's had failed in their incantations, through the abrupt exclamation of Betsy. May-day had been observed in some degree, though the pole was down; and all the young girls had turned out in the morning and washed their faces with the dew; and they had also strewn the hearth with white embers, to seek in the snail-track the initials of their lovers. The sycamores had the bees about them, the beeches were deepening; the chestnuts were pushing into blossom, and the limes were greening; there was a mass of herbage by the river, and the kingfisher had been seen there, and a deeper blue was spreading through the sky.

Nelly had settled down to her painting, and had been busy amongst the cottages, and she was now looking forward to her annual visit to the Academy, and a sojourn with her Aunts Hamilton at Bayswater; and

Frank was hoping to go with her in a week hence, and to stay over the Derby.

But before they start they have promised to spend a day with Uncle Charles; and as he has written to say "the otter hounds are coming to Bickley, and they had better come too," they have arranged to go up there on the morrow, as the meet is early the next morning,—for they have a weakness for otter hounds, and they anticipate sport.

"Now, how are we to go this evening, Nelly, with the poles and the tranklements," said Frank, "or take the horses? because you know, the last time they met, you came to decided grief at the fences." "The horses decidedly, if you give me the option." "Good; then we can have a few jumps and a gallop." "Nothing," said Nelly, "will suit me better, for there are some good wide ditches in the meadows, and some tempting fences by the river; and it will be a treat

for Saucy Boy." "To say nothing of yourself. Well, we can perhaps keep together better if they do find. Gilbert and Freeman and Burgess are asked to the breakfast, and they will come up in the dog-cart, so they can bring our belongings; and I fancy, as there will be a jolly party there, we shall have some fun." "Oh, a gallop by the river will be delightful, and glorious if we get some jumping! But I must go now," said Nelly, "and see my pet, and tell him all about it, and the treat that is in store for him; so mind you are ready at three; you will find me in the saddle, and waiting."

At three they started; Nelly on Saucy Boy, and Frank on Firefly. "I must just go up to those timber people," said he, as they went up the lane, "but if you will ride on quietly, Nell, I shall soon overtake you." "Very well," was the reply; but seeing him, as she turned round in her

saddle, looking for a gap, as a timber stick blocked up the gateway, she exclaimed, "Oh, if you are going in for a jump, young man, I shall have one too," and came back to him. "Well, stop a bit, then, till I can find a place, and I'll give you a lead over." "The vanity of the man," said Nelly. "Never mind a gap, I prefer the fence. Here, stand aside a bit; ladies first, if you please, sir;" and over she went into the field, where the men and women were, Frank following her.

"Now for a bit of timber work!" said she, as she caught sight of the trees that were lying there. "Oh, I can't help it, Frank, it's too tempting. Well, Timmins; how d'ye do, Mrs. Pascoe? Mind yourself, Price!" were her salutations to the strangers, and over went the little lady, scattering the women who were "ranking" as she took all the sticks in succession; when, turning her horse round, and crying, "stop Frank, I

must have them back again," she jumped them once more, and then joined him. "You madcap!" said he, "suppose you had caught them, you would have come down a crasher." "But I did not catch them; you know better, don't you, Saucy Boy," said Nelly, patting him, "but if I had come down, I could have picked myself up again." "You will come to grief some day, certain," said Frank. "Not a doubt of it," was the reply. "Well, old man, you'll fish me out, won't you, if I get in the river to-morrow?" "Yes," said Frank, "I must, for otter's teeth are sharp, and they'll nip you if you get near them;" at which remark she looked serious for a moment, and then hit him with her whip, with "You tease, you; I'll gallop you to-morrow for a pair of gloves, and over the ditches too."

A pleasant ride of five miles brought them to Bickley Manor House—an old half-timbered

place, above the Teme—where they had a very jolly evening; and early the next morning, after a merry breakfast on the lawn—for the party was a large one—Frank and Nelly, and Fred and Annie—who, too, loved hounds, and could go with them—turned out on horseback, Mr. Charles Hamilton accompanying them on his cob Tearaway—a fitting name for him, for the rascal bolted whenever he had the chance of it; but as "Uncle Charles" had good hands, and knew how to use them, he seldom got much by his move, beyond letting the steam off. Freeman and Gilbert and Burgess, and the rest of the gentlemen there, were on foot, with their poles, as they meant business. The ladies of the neighbourhood were in great force, some riding, some walking; the latter for the most part being got up in true orthodox costume as befitting the occasion.

When all were assembled in the meadow, it was a pretty scene; for the fields sloped down to the river, and woods rose from it to some steep green hills, which cut the blue sky with their close turf tops; and the woodcutters were at work in the woods, and you could see their teams and their timber-wagons in the breaks where the trees fell, and the smoke curling up from their fires. And you caught the cry of the jays and the doves and the pheasants; and the clank and the creak and the strain, and the noise of the men and their horses, as they tore away at the sticks to get them up out of the hollows. And as you stood still there to watch them, you could smell distinctly the sweet fresh odour of crushed leaves and hyacinths, which rose up where the trees had fallen, and which seemed to blend with the scent of the hawthorn hedges and the apple blossom; and with the orchis and the

meadow-sweet, and the cowslips that the ladies were gathering, while waiting by the river for the hounds.

The meet was fixed for ten, and a good morning was expected, as two pairs of otters had been seen there. Time was, when, meeting at three, before the sun rose, they would have their first kill as the lark soared; but now-a-days, eight is the earliest for otter hounds, so the freshest of the morning is missed. But the alteration of the hour, and the abandonment of the otter spear — as being a cruel and unfair practice—gives the ladies a chance now to turn out with them in the green meadows, and to brush the hawthorn blossoms from the boughs, as in boots and gaiters, and looped-up skirts, they try to emulate the gentlemen, in negociating the fences. As the time draws near, from three to four hundred people are assembled; the sportsmen on foot, and

lots of the gazers on horseback, ladies and gentlemen.

At length, as led horses are being walked about, and the gentlemen are amusing themselves with pole-work at the ditches, a glimpse of colour is seen between the withies, where the river bends beyond them; and the huntsman and his two whips approach in their blue and scarlet, with fifteen couples of hounds, and half-a-dozen terriers; the condition of the rough-haired grippers—some two-and-twenty pound tough old dogs—doing credit to their gallant master, the Major; for they are strong-boned and even ones; long-backed, bow-legged, and deep-chested; with bell-like note; and many of them scarred, that told of old dog-otters dying gamely.

Their greetings over, men and hounds spread out, and casting along by the willows, they strike the trail; but the sun

is hot, and the spraint is faint; but mending in the rushy meadows the hounds scent the water, and dash away by the side of it; when the seal is hit, and the spraint is struck; and the pack take it up so lustily that the foot people are distanced.

On go Nelly and Frank and Annie, with the mounted ones, the cob Tearaway being at once checkmated in his wild resolve to bolt with Uncle Charles and head them. Ditches are jumped, fences fled, and stiles popped over, and whip hand before the eyes is the order of the day, as ash and osier beds are struggled through, to keep pace with the hounds; Freeman, Gilbert, Burgess, and Fred Hamilton, with the rest of the jumpers, taking the rails pluckily, and getting through a vast amount of pole-work in a very little time, in their strenuous endeavours to keep a good place down the meadows.

"Yelp, yelp, yelp," come the bell-notes, as the little bow legs race on, full cry by the water, Bellman leading. "Hark to Rattler!" says the Major. "Rattler marks him. Good dog, Bellman; Fanger, Tuner, Swimmer! good dogs; hark to him! hark!" and Bellman and Rattler dash into the river, and taking up the scent on the other side, "Yelp, yelp, yelp!" come the notes again; and the rest follow them, and carry it on splendidly as they race for the mill; the gamest of the pole-people splashing through the river after them, with their stout ash poles—the water up to their waists—with those on horseback; and Nelly is amongst them, and in the seventh heaven of delight, as Saucy Boy shakes the drops off him, and bounds up the bank—while the rest, racing and running down the meadows, shout with the joy of it.

"A holt for a crown!" cries Hamilton,

as he comes pounding on the cob, and the hounds set by the mill-stream, and show by their deep baying and determined aspect, that the otter is there. "Safe bet," says the Major; "let Jem go at him." So the terriers, Jem, and Tartar, and Tip, and their three chums, are brought to the holt, and the men proddle at the bank with their poles, and encourage the varmints to grip him. "Look out," says Frank, after they have rattled away at it for half-an-hour," they'll bolt him in a minute." "Ho gaze!" cries the huntsman, as the otter slips into the water, and dives across it, the bells on its surface tracking him. Over go the hounds and back slips the otter, but he is again bolted by the proddlers; when altering his tactics, he takes down stream, the pack on good terms with him.

They soon check, however; some land and hunt about, some sniff the banks; but a

vent is seen, and a black nose spied, and "Ho gaze!" is the cry again; and down the hounds go swimming in the stream; but the otter is gaining, for "Ho gaze!" is heard right down the river, somewhere near the mill—the second mill. "Come along, Nelly," says her uncle. "This is glorious; we'll nick the ford;" and splashing through the water, Nelly and Annie sweep their skirts and follow him; Frank and others getting well over, the pole men also, as the foot people race their hardest to get round by the bridge.

"He hasn't passed yet," says the miller, "but he's close at. Be quiet, for there he is; there! coming along under the water; I can see him. Look out, there the beggar goes!" says he, as the otter rises to vent, and then slides over the weir into the mill-pool under, and goes down with the rush of the water, over the shallows and into

the depths; and thence far down to the broad water at the bend, where the stream is wider; the sportsmen wading, and the hounds crossing and recrossing with each move of their prey.

There is no holt there, however, or he fails to find it, or to reach it, and he turns up stream for his old quarters, or for safer ground; and the hounds go hunting his wash below, for they miss him as he dives; when, finding they are at fault, they try the sides, and turning for the mill meadows come up under the alder stubs. There Ranger touches him off, for he has stayed to rest, and the delay is fatal; the pack comes up, a little black nose is seen, and under he goes again.

But the vents are more frequent, and the nose shows oftener; the hounds dive and come up again, and three or four of them colour the water. They dive again and

close; the otter shows on the surface, and Ranger gives the death grip!

Thus ended a good drag of an hour and fifty minutes. The terriers behaved capitally, grabbing pluckily at the otter when he showed on the surface, and tackling him in his holt like game ones; little Jem refusing to be satisfied. He was a dog-otter, and weighed nineteen pounds. Notes are compared, and feats recited; and the waders and runners and riders feel on good terms with themselves. Nelly was in at the grip, and she had lots of jumping, and she has a great deal to say to Saucy Boy as to his share in the matter.

Questing up the stream for another, "A trail here," says the Major. "Hark to Swimmer! Tuner marks him. Good dog, Tuner;" and soon the bell notes of the little pack tell there is an otter afoot; and beyond the mill, and a few hundred yards

from the holt of the first one, the hounds set, and bay loudly, and dash into the water; and then, tearing and scratching, work away under the roots of an alder stub, while the men urge them, and the proddlers drive their poles into the bank, to stir the animal.

A splash beyond is heard as he bolts at another outlet, and "Ho gaze!" is the cry, which soon brings men and hounds; and down the river they go again at best pace, but the otter does them, for he finds another holt, and goes into it. "The rascal!" cries the huntsman; "now we'll have the spades and the mattocks, and make short work of it. Bring the varmints."

So Tip, Jem, and company arrive with the men, who set to work to dig him out; half-a-dozen of them in the water stocking vigorously; the hounds being kept in check, while the crowd keeps back; and Nelly and

Annie and Frank have a race on their own account up the meadows, and a bit of jumping. Tip and Tartar are most earnest, and Jem is desperate, and the three others have their innings also. But the otter is obstinate and will not stir; and it is not until more gallops have been indulged in by the merry ones and others of the party, and an impromptu steeple-chase has been decided, that after the lapse of an hour, and when Jem and Tartar have felt his teeth, he decides it is at last getting too hot for him, and he will have a cooler in the water.

"Keep clear," cries the Major, "and give him law. He's a dog, and a good one!" and out comes the otter; and when he has had a fair start, the hounds are let go, and splashing commences, and zigzag work and scrimmaging ensue. But the bow-legs are good swimmers, and the pace tells. Back with a long dive comes the otter, and the

hounds turn again; and they come up stream together rapidly, straight for the holt. Foiled in his attempt by Freeman, who has remained on the watch there—up to his hips in the water—the otter, with a grin at him, dives again, passes beneath the stubs, and, swimming under the hounds as they come up for him, gets a lead.

"Ho gaze! Ho gaze!" as the otter vents, sets them going again, and the uproar increases; and as the hounds swim their hardest they come up with him, and stopping him each time he shows his nose, they drive him to the shallows. Finding he is there visible to the whole pack, he makes a desperate effort to get back again; and just as his last chance of doing so seems over, under he goes, and comes up beyond them; dives again and distances them; finds a fresh holt, and walks into it.

But it is little rest that he will get now,

for the hounds are keen, and the huntsman is on the alert to tail him; the proddlers bolt him, and four or five hounds grapple him; but he pins them, and they loose again, and another swim follows; when finding himself closely pressed, he leaves the river for the meadows, and takes up a backwater. The crowd head him with shouts, and force him to the river again; when, after coming a time or two to the surface to get breath, he is seized by Jem, and held by Tartar, the hounds closing round him, each trying to get a grip; but down goes the otter below, and he makes them release him.

Swimmer, however, soon marks him, and, as he shows again, grapples him instantly; but the otter grips him, and the water reddens. Another dive, and up stream they go, men, hounds, and terriers keener than ever, for the finish is at hand; when once

again the otter tries to land, but they surround him, rush into him, and kill him; the huntsman catching him by the tail and lodging him out of harm's way in the fork of a tree, and giving the death halloo as he does so; while the hounds baying in chorus, wake the echoes in the woods, and they reverberate to the hills.

The otter was a fine one, just three-and-twenty pounds; and the time, including the dig out, two hours and forty minutes. "A good drag, Hamilton," says the Major; "there'll be two otter muffs for the ladies."

CHAPTER IV.

THE FOUR-IN-HANDS—THE MEETING IN THE PARK.

A LOVELY evening at the end of May—warm, bright, and sunny; a crowd of well-dressed people wending westward—crowds from the Academy, and through the Square, for the costly home for pictures had not risen; crowds up Pall Mall—St. James's Street the same; the windows filled with parti-coloured dresses, the balconies all hung with scarlet cloth. Slow traffic thence for people and for carriages; blocks here and there; a stoppage at the Park—the Queen, *en route* for

Paddington, with outriders and escort of the Guards.

The Park itself—by Row, and Ride, and river—packed with a mass of carriages and people: the first in hundreds and the last in thousands, and each still coming; all pressing forward for the sight in store—the Four-in-hand parade at five o'clock.

The day is Saturday—that welcomed one, the one before the Derby; and half the drags there are already placed. Green are the trees, and greener still the turf, and flushed with colour are the rhododendrons. Blue, deep blue is the sky; white clouds are in it, but almost motionless, so slight the breeze. Most air is found beneath the lime-trees' shade—there, greatest coolness; and carriages are ranked on either side, backed by the people—a perfect mass of them, from Hyde Park Corner to the Magazine. It is just the same, too, on the other side, away to Kensing-

ton; for English people love good horses dearly.

The crowd still gathers; muslins, bright and sunny—striped, white, and lavender, pink, buff, and blue—get massed, and spot not, as the press increases; and soon, all up the sides, is charming colour. Continued bending forward, lots of peeping; a little laughing, and a deal of talk; a grip of reins, a steadying of horses, and rubbing of their sides with doubled whip. A hum of voices up beside the river, and much loud chatter underneath the trees. The roadway cleared, then filled with moving forms that soon blot out the silver of the lake. "Stand back!" the cry; "the sight we wait is coming."

Jingle, jingle, sound the bars, and tap, tap, the horses; and proudly on come three-and-twenty teams, in six-and-forty couples —bays, browns and chesnuts, duns and roans and greys—each team a sight to stir an old

man's pulse; each horse a beauty young men long to drive. A week before, and two-and-thirty coaches had driven there in line—a grand parade—with spanking teams and lady travellers—"The Coaching Club;" 'twas now "The Four-in-hand," equal in horsing, and in lady-loading; a faultless turn-out.

First comes the Duke, with Lady Blanche beside him—a motley team; two shades of bay, a chesnut, and a grey; and next, two noble Lords, a roan team and a brown, the roan, perfection; and a gallant Marquis, with his brother Blues, good across country. Then a plain Mr., with the Life Guards' drag; and next, a team of browns, each horse a match; then roans again; followed by black, mixed, grey, and chesnut teams; the last, a matchless one, worth a day's march to see. A welcome stoppage; and ladies pat the chesnuts' satin coats, and call them "beauties." Then as they move again,

on comes the Captain, with jerk of head, and elbows squared to work; and after him, a splendid team of greys. More Lords and commoners, all well-known whips; no team a bad one; every one well handled, in workman fashion; all appointments perfect. Bright bits, and glossy reins, and spotless panels; pole chains like silver; and on every drag, light pretty costumes, and most charming faces.

A sight to see, my worthy country-cousins! a sight none soon forget, framed, as it always is, with glorious greenery. Nor yet that other sight that—lucky beings!—we in Town can see each evening in the Season—the Row, the Ride, the Mile; the lady riders, countless carriages, and gay array of faultless "fashion-dresses," under the acacias and by the tall tree-ferns; where scarlet rhododendrons mass their colours and light the background of our pretty Park.

The last drag passes, and then comes a rush, off by the waterfall and across the Park, to see the drags go out at Albert Gate and watch them coming up to Hyde Park Corner; thence *viâ* Piccadilly, Pall Mall, and Westminster, and off to Greenwich. Then come the carriages, line after line, until they thicken four-deep round the Park; the Row is filled with horsemen and horsewomen; and ladies filter quickly from the crowd and settle down, till not a seat is vacant by the Ride.

The drags have passed, and now that sight is over. Soldiers and servant-girls, and dogs and children, loafers and loungers, grooms and City swells, club-men and betting-men —all sorts of people, get mixed together in one surging mass, which struggles, and then spreads under the sycamores and lofty limes, the chesnut-trees and widely-spreading elms, across the turf and by the flower-beds, to

wait the next sight—Royalty and fashion! and note the costly costumes and the little dogs, the stepping steeds and all the lady-whips, the made complexions and the wondrous hair, and all the range of equipage, from high-hung chariots to tiny broughams, drawn by pet ponies worth four hundred pounds the pair. A moving, glittering throng, which soon increases, and thins not even for the next two hours.

"There's Miss Hamilton," said Anderson, as he raised his hat to some ladies in a carriage. "Oh, is there?" said Frank, who was gazing after the Princess, who had just driven by with her two boys; "I did not see her. She is with her aunts; she said she should be here. I hope she saw the drags; she loves good horses." "Yes, I hope she did," said Harry; "though there are lots of splendid steppers, as you see. Well, let us make a move," said he, after they had sat by the

Ride for some time, and he, knowing by sight, as a frequenter of the Park, most of the celebrities of the day, had pointed them out to Frank as each went by. "The Prince is in the Row; come and have a look at his chesnut. He will be down again directly."

So they went; and each lighting a cigar at the rails, they leant upon them, to criticise the horses and to comment on their riders. To Frank it was no new sight, as he always came up to Town for a week or two in the Season, just for the Derby, and to have a look round, and see what there was to be seen. But it was none the less interesting for all that, as any man will tell you who is fond of horses, and as those too will tell you who see such sights each day. He was now up with Nelly, who was staying with her aunts—Aunt Sarah and Aunt Mary, maiden sisters of John Hamilton, at West-

bourne Terrace, Bayswater, and to whom the Academy was this year a greater attraction then ever—it was her third Season in Town—as Anderson, who was now well known to her, was again an exhibitor. "There's a goer for you," said Frank, as a game-looking little horse passed them, handled splendidly by one who knew how to ride him; "I should just like a fast twenty minutes on him in our country. Or that one," said he; "he could fly his fences, if you like. Look what a reach he has, and how well he brings his legs under him in his gallop. There's another—what a mover! I wish I had that one for Nelly. How she handles him, and how well she sits him! A professional, I expect."

"She is," said Harry; "and one of our best riders. Yonder, too, is another of them—the one in the dark-blue habit. The horse she is on she is breaking for a Duchess. He

was bought at Tattersall's, and cost six hundred." "Here comes a weight-carrier—a horse to suit the governor. He did not go amiss, though, that day on 'Yeoman,' did he?" said Frank, alluding to a day with hounds that Anderson had with them, according to his promise at the Hunt Ball. "No," said Harry, "nor on either of the other days —that last day especially. That was a day! I never saw any man of his age go better; the Gorse day, I mean, when your sister jumped the brook and he fled the ox-rails, and you and I got stuck at the 'double' in the dingle." "Ah! I know. He is a rare old plucked one, is my father; there are few out can touch him." "So I could see," was the reply. "There's a cob for you, my boy! There's a hundred and sixty guineas under that saddle; he had him out of Leicestershire." "A clipper," said Frank; "a perfect picture!" "Here's another beauty—this long,

low one. You should see her creep away from them when hounds go!"

"Ah! spotting the good ones, as usual?" said a well-known voice close to them. "How full the Row is! Some hundreds here to choose from. How are you, Harry? A nice evening, Mr. Hamilton;" and Gerard Griffiths, the journalist, lolled there too. "Hillo!" said he, "there's Teddy yonder; we shall catch his eye directly—he is deep in thought;" and as he looked across and recognised them, Edward Paterson came over and joined them. He was a young author, and known to each of them.

"You look particularly pleasant, this evening," said Griffiths; "who's been a puttin' on you? Has some old uncle cut you off with a shilling, Ted, for venturing into the realms of authorship, instead of sticking to business?" "Well, not so bad as that," was the reply; "but those diabolical

critics have been pitching into me, for my new book; and that rascally—naming the paper—has now smashed me up awfully!" "Oh," said Griffiths, "I thought it was something serious." "Serious enough, I think!" said Paterson; "a very nice thing for my friends to see; it will shut the book up; I shall never get a penny by it!" "Now don't you cry out before you're hurt, my boy. It is of very little moment, either way, as you will find," said Griffiths; "though I must own I was as nervous as you are when I commenced to scribble—some years ago now, Ted—but I did not then know the ins and outs of it as I do now. Don't you bother yourself." "Aye, it's all very well for you, Master Gerard," said Paterson; "you have a position; but for a young hand as I am, it's hard lines, very hard lines! It will stop it at the Libraries, and spoil all sale." "Nonsense, man," said Griffiths, "it

will do nothing of the kind. The Libraries ordered all they meant to have before your copies reached you; and what more they'll need depends upon demand. A well-abused book will not want for readers, take my word for it; and if those are many, copies must be too. Wait till November, you will see by then." "Well, you ought to know; but how do you make it out?" "This way," said he: "your book was issued on the first of the month—February, I think?—a bad time; why, I will tell you presently. Before the end of the previous month, January, Mr. Mudie and the rest of them would want to know what books they must put upon their list for the ensuing month—not very interesting to you, Mr. Hamilton, but I am supplying information." "Which I like to hear," said Frank. "Go on." "Therefore," said Griffiths, "half-a-dozen copies of your book, amongst others, would

be pulled in advance, and submitted to them. If on looking through the pages they found sufficient in them to know the works would command a certain circle of readers, they would then order accordingly; Mr. Mudie sixty, eighty, or one hundred copies, perhaps, and the rest in proportion; or if the book had a good name to it, twice or thrice that number, when a second edition would soon follow the first. The first copies struck off would then be sent to the Libraries, to the total of the order—and some copies of every book are ordered by one or other—and the remainder of the edition placed upon the shelves of the publisher, to await demand; a score or so of copies, with ploughed edges, being sent to the different papers and journals for review at their convenience." "I see," said Paterson. "So that you really are at the Libraries already, young man, and have been there for months. How many critiques

have there been?" "Let me see," said Paterson. "One good, one passable, two cutters-up, and this smasher." "Making five," said Griffiths, "and very likely all you'll have; for many of the papers and journals review only books with good names to them. And when did the first appear?" "The third of this month." "Just so; then the book had a three months' chance before one word appeared about it; for copies of it would—as soon as it was issued—have been sent into the country with other new works, with each book-parcel; and other copies of it would be circulated in Town, amongst those very useful people who make it a rule to wade through each new novel. What is the influence, therefore, of those critiques?" "Not much, certainly, as you put it, with a three months' circulation in advance," said Paterson. "I should think not," said Griffiths; "besides, it matters

little if even a book does get in for it, for a good cutting-up stimulates curiosity. Those who read reviews, my boy, do so for their own pastime; but if they really want to know what a book is like, they get it and go through it. They will not surrender their judgment to half-a-dozen lines in this paper or in that, you may depend upon it." "Well," said Paterson, "we shall soon see what the other papers say about it." "I don't suppose you will," replied Griffiths, "for some weeks yet, not till the Season is over; and when they do give it a turn, it will most likely be in a batch with others, all lumped together, when there is much less chance of the critiques being read, as people will then be pleasuring, and so less inclined than ever to go through them. Why, the very first book," said he, "that I published—it made a hit, luckily—actually sold out the five hundred edition—it was a

three vol.—before a third of the papers had reviewed it." "How was that?" said Paterson. "Simply because it was months before they did review it. No book gets reviewed until it has been published some time—often many months—because books accumulate, and reviewers are but human—except, I should say, in the case of books by well-known names; and then it matters not. Their names are known, and their books are read. Now, while books are waiting review, what do you think they are doing all that time? resting on the shelves of the publishers till the world is told about them? Nonsense, Ted! They are being reviewed at first hand by the public at large, through the medium of Circulating Libraries. Be sure your book, for good or ill, is reckoned up by this time." "But you said February was a bad time to bring a book out. What does it matter, Gerard, when you publish?" "Nothing,"

was the reply, "if you are known, everything if you are not known. It is this way: from the commencement of the Drawing Rooms to the end of the Season—say the latter end of March to the middle of August—nothing whatever is doing in the book trade; it is the dead season, and no book moves—not in Town at least; therefore, if you publish in the spring, whatever push it may make in the country, you have only the chance of a Town circulation for a few weeks—there is too much going on then for people to bother themselves with books; and by November, when they have all come back again, your book—unless, as I say, you are known—may have been superseded by new ones, and not again be asked for, as was the case with one of mine, Ted, though it sold more than half the edition in the first five weeks. But if—if my boy, you publish in the autumn, then, known or not,

you have a fair chance before you, for, should your book be readable, you may be pretty sure of securing for some months a reading public. So that you see, Teddy, there is a time for everything, even publication." "I suppose those critics are most awful fellows," said Frank, "they seem to delight in doing the sarcastic, and picking out odd bits to pitch into people?" "I don't know that they are," said Griffiths, "not those that I know, at least; but if they do let out now and then, you must not wonder at it, for, as I said before, critics are but human." "Inhuman, Gerard. Don't abuse the word. Here, just read that—a perfect tomahawker. Human!" said Paterson, as he handed it to Griffiths.

"You two fellows are missing all these good horses," said Frank. "There's a stepper for you!" "Yes," said Griffiths, "he's a good horse, and so is that one, a very good

horse. But about these critics, these terrible fellows, Ted. Now, this," said he, looking at the critique, "is a case in point; I know the writer. He is in the doctor's hands—congested liver. Yours is a stinger, certainly, but until he mends, they all will have it hot! 'Tis quite excusable." "Confound his liver, he should wait awhile!" said Paterson. "It can't be done, my boy; for copy, copy, is the weekly cry. I can tell you, however, if you like, how you can checkmate a savage one, when he does give you a slating, because I have done it myself, and it answers. Send a score of copies of it to a score of friends, and ask them to read the work, and say if that's 'deserved.' You elicit sympathy, and advertise it." "It is not a bad plan. They feel indignant and so talk about it, and it makes the book known." "Then this one's liver, Gerard, was all right? Just look at that." "I see; the good one. Well, perhaps it

was; but when he wrote that—the third of May, I see—he had come into some money that an old aunt left him, and so, for a month at least, he no doubt would be amiable." "You have spoiled it now," laughed Anderson, "by explanation." "Oh, our friend here is not so very bumptious, are you, Teddy?" "Well," was his response, "it is pleasanter to be patted than kicked; but they are an awfully savage set, I know. Own up now, Griffiths." "No, they are not," was the reply. "There are certainly some testy ones amongst them, who delight in slaughter, but, as a class, they are well-bred, well-read men, quiet and gentlemanly; who, if they could conscientiously say a good word for a fellow, would, I think, do so; but their very occupation making them critical, they soon can put their finger on the blots—which are in every book; therefore, if those blots have to be mentioned,

the fault is with the author, not themselves." "Confound them all," said Teddy; "one ought to ponder every word one writes, to see how they could twist it." "If you did that," said Griffiths, "you would never write a line. To write with the fear of the critics before you, would cramp you horribly. Do your best, Ted; know first what you are going to write about, and then leave the rest to fate." "I am too thin-skinn'd," said Paterson. "Then here's a remedy—do as I did. I got a little book, and made two columns, marked 'Bane' and 'Antidote;' and in it pasted each critique there was, each in its column; and when there came a really good one, Ted, I put it at the bottom, marked 'Perfect cure.' That way did cure me, for I found it answer, one column mostly balancing the other—I'll show it you; I have it at my rooms. You will see there also how some men can differ, for

what one praises, others will cut up; the subject influences them. What one man likes, another does not care for—you see the same thing, daily too, in Art. Take the Academy, excluding just those pictures now town's talk, look how they differ! The 'vilest daub' with one, becomes 'a glorious picture' with another. We have our likings, and our fancies too, and so have they—you need not therefore shy so at critiques. They are necessary evils certainly, but, as Charles Matthews says, in 'Used up,' 'there's nothing in it—nothing!'"

"Well," said Anderson, "I think if you fellows have had enough of criticising the critics, we had better be moving on. It is well there are none of them by just now to hear you." "I think it is," said Griffiths, "or Ted would catch it. Where are you bound for?" "Park Lane, as we are here, to catch a cab, and get a bit of dinner;

then to the 'Prince of Wales,' as Frank has not been there, to see Marie Wilton in 'Society.' Will you come along?" "I don't mind if I do," said Griffiths. "I have nothing on particularly for this evening, and though I have seen it twice it will bear seeing again; and it will soon be getting too hot for any theatres." "Paterson, you'll join us, won't you?" "I would Harry, but I am engaged. I am going your way, though—some of it, however, for I am due shortly at St. John's Wood, to see Dick Dallow's picture before he sends it home." "Come along, then," said Anderson; and they crossed to the other side of the Row, through the riders.

"There's a row down yonder," said Frank, looking to the waterfall; "a scrimmage of some kind, for there's a peeler there; I vote we go to see it." "On with you, then," said Harry, "but it will be something like

going to a fire, end in a sell, I expect. Hillo!" said he, "what's that girl scudding along for, yonder, for the drive? By Jove," said he, taking a sudden interest in the proceedings, after he had watched her for a moment; "there's something up!" and passing Frank, he was first on the spot.

It was all over, however, when they came up, and the man who was the cause of it was walking off in an opposite direction, the peeler telling him to "walk that way now, and if I see you follow her, I'll run you in." It appeared that the fellow, claiming to know her, had tried to detain some girl against her will—"a very lady-like looking person, indeed, sir," said the policeman, and two gentlemen who were coming by, seeing the girl's distress, interfered, and held him until a policeman came up. However, as the girl had got away, he was allowed to go about his business. "I wonder whether

he really did know her," said Frank. "Impossible to say; just as likely not," said Anderson. "I have seen that fellow before somewhere, I fancy," said Frank. "I seem to know his face, though I cannot call to mind when or where I met him, but I have met him, I am sure." "Very possible," was the reply, "the thousands you pass in Town." "I was not thinking of Town," said he; "it was in the country, but where I can't remember."

While they were at dinner, Frank suddenly exclaimed, "I have it! I knew I had met him somewhere. I seldom forget faces. It is Lewis, a young farmer fellow, who used to be in our part of the country. He went to the bad, I believe. You have heard me speak of him, Harry, in connection with that tenant of ours, old Lawson of Landimoor." "Yes," was the reply, "I think I have. What is he doing here?" "No good,

you may be sure. But that's the man for a certainty."

Frank was right, and so was Harry too, in his recognition of the girl who ran. He was wise enough, however, to keep his counsel; but after dinner he sent a telegram, and he wrote a note, and posted it.

The telegram was this: "Lewis. Keep in to-morrow. Will send a line to-night. Be on your guard." And Jessie had it as she went to bed. The letter she had on the Monday morning. Thus was it worded: "I saw you in the Park. Too late, however. Frank recognised him. Engaged to-morrow. Will call 10.30, Monday."

CHAPTER V.

MOONLIGHT ON THE WATER.—BREEZY BRIGHTON.

COULD Anderson have seen Jessie that evening he would have done so, but under the circumstances it was impossible; for, apart from the theatre, which would make him late, he had arranged to return with his friend Frank to supper, and to stay the night with him, that they might be the better enabled to go together to the Temple church in the morning; and as he had also promised to dine with him afterwards, it was equally impossible he could see her until Monday;

for on the Sunday afternoon they were both due in Kensington Gardens at five o'clock, to meet Miss Hamilton and her aunts, and to accompany them to Westbourne Terrace to tea; so he sent the telegram and wrote the letter.

Returning from the theatre to the "Golden Cross," Charing Cross, where Frank, knowing a lot of fellows, always stayed when he was in town—his aunt's hours being as a rule too early to suit him—they had a pleasant chat and a smoke together before getting to bed; which, however, they did not reach for some considerable time, as the excitement of "a large fire in the City" induced them to turn out, and to cab it there as quickly as possible; so Frank had a chance of seeing one of the many big fires of London, and they were late in consequence at breakfast. They managed, however, to be in time to hear Dr. Vaughan,

and they kept their appointment in the afternoon.

Nelly's aunts were nice people, who, remembering the amusements of their younger days, liked "young people" to go about also, and to enjoy themselves; thinking that to their stock of other knowledge, there might usefully be added a little knowledge of the world, always, however, with the reservation of "under supervision." Their supervision, though—good, worthy creatures—was but a word, a name; it was simply companionship; the company of two well-informed, clever women, who would have made excellent wives, had not they refused all offers by preferring to live together.

Their respective ages were forty and forty-four, though they each looked younger; and the annual visit of their niece Nelly was always as great a pleasure to them as it was to her; she being taken by them

to see all that was worth seeing of the sights of London; and next year Annie, Charles's daughter, who was now eighteen, was also to accompany her. There was another aunt too, at Brighton, the wife of Dr. James Hamilton, who was a man in good practice, and John's younger brother. He lived in the western part of Brighton—Brunswick Square—and had married six years previously, when she was six-and-twenty, the widow of the fashionable physician there, Dr. John Hatherley; and she was still almost as handsome a woman as when, at eighteen years of age, she resigned her maiden name of Miss Jane Wilmot.

Her father, the Rev. Francis Wilmot, was a man in years—he was sixty-eight—who, marrying at five-and-thirty, lost his wife when she gave birth to Lizzie, who, with Kate, his other child—two fine-grown girls

of twenty-four and twenty-eight, continued to live with him, and to keep his house. His age and failing health obliging him to give up his Living, all he did now was to dabble a bit in literature; and contribute to "Notes and Queries," and send occasional papers to the "Guardian" and "Athenæum;" while his staple food consisted of the "Times" and the "Saturday;" the clever, slashing articles in the weekly affording him immense satisfaction; "no mere meat for babes—good wholesome diet," as was his frequent remark to his friends, when some extra stinger had made him chuckle. He was one of the "hit hard" sort of people—"spare the rod and spoil the author;" and a bit of caustic writing, if it was cleverly done, delighted him.

The Misses Wilmot were thus, by marriage, related to Nelly, who, whenever she came to Town, was always expected to spend

some days with them, at The Cedars, at Brompton. Kate was of the party in the Gardens, and Lizzie, who had a Sunday-school class in the afternoon, joined them at tea.

It was a lovely evening; sunny enough to make the shade of the trees preferable to those who were there, and with breeze enough to rustle the leaves over them, and to ripple the lake in the front of them, where the swans were sailing; and as Nelly sat there by the pretty garden of The Cottage, and saw the hundreds of chairs around her all occupied by rank and fashion, and the most costly costumes of blended colours, intermingling on the turf, as groups moved to and fro, and swept the green sward, she was bound to acknowledge there was a charm in it; and when the murmur of the water-fall, the splashings of the fountains, and the songs of the birds came to her in the little

lulls of chatter, she could not help thinking that if the rattle and gaiety of Town enhanced the pleasures of the country, the quietude of the country, in its turn, enabled her to still more enjoy those occasional glimpses of life and fashion, when she did get them; and it was not until the company began to thin that they got up to go.

Then, as the sun-spots passed from group to group, till overtaken by the lengthening shadows, the lights got rosy on the sheet of water, and through the stately elms came streaks of gold. Dull greys were thickening eastward over all—the city sinking down into its rest; but westward was aglow, with crimson flushings, and with purple clouds, and just a tinge of apple-green on high, with one star in it. The rooks were settling, and the sheep were down, and all beneath the trees was twilight dimness; and when Nelly looked back to the gay parterre, it was

one broad shadow—the London "world" was gone.

The next morning—having on the previous evening pleaded an engagement, which would prevent him accompanying the aunt's party to the Crystal Palace—Anderson called on Jessie, and at the time fixed, half-past ten; and found her anxiously awaiting him. For a week or two after their unexpected meeting at Paddington, on the sixteenth of January, Jessie was very middling, a slight relapse having taken place; but as she was well cared for, and well seen to, she soon got over it. She was now quite well, and looked well, dressed as she was with scrupulous neatness, and in quiet and lady-like taste, and inexpensively. She was still in mourning for her little boy, and everything about her showed far more culture than what one would have supposed, judged simply by the early surroundings of her own home.

She was merely "in rooms"—at Brixton—but a glance was sufficient. The disposition of the furniture, the decorations of the room, the feminine knick-knacks, and the arrangement of her flowers, all pointed to a refinement, and a love of order, which seemed to indicate a certain degree of contact with good society.

Her age was twenty-nine, and she was a dark brunette, with a fine commanding figure, and tall and handsome; but though her full half-parted lips showed strong affections, the marked character of the lower part of her face, and the quick flashings of her hazel eyes, betokened warmth of temper. She was loving, self-willed, and passionate. Her hair, which was now banded in plain braids, was, when loosened, blue-black, to her waist, and wavy—a gipsy tint—and it was this wealth of blue-black hair, and the almost olive tint of her complexion, that

made Anderson decide—when, a short time ago, he had a commission for another figure-subject—to paint her as a gipsy; and the picture of "Barbara Lovell, the Gipsy Beauty," was now on an easel in the next room, waiting to be finished.

There was a marked likeness in Jessie's face to that of her brother George—a family likeness—and this picture of her had been removed from the studio in North Audley Street, when Frank came up. The easel was a fixture, as Anderson often painted there. She was his model; and about the room were canvasses and drapery, and palettes, paints, and brushes. It was handy for him when he wanted quiet, or to escape the callers; and handy for her too, by saving her some journeys in wet weather, when he came there and worked at some other picture of her he was painting. That other just now

was a "Cleopatra." It was turned face to the wall.

"Yes, I was frightened very much," said she, in answer to him. "I had been shopping in Pimlico, and had strolled up into the Park to have a look at the chesnuts. I thought it so kind of you to send that telegram, but I shall dread now to move out, or at least to go into the Park again." "It is years, I think, since you encountered him?" "Yes, more than four, not since that week when we left for New York; but I always dreaded him, and now I am sure to do so more than ever." "Well, do not think of him. I thought it well to say, 'be on your guard,' lest he had tracked you; but should you meet again, and he tries to stop you, give him in charge, and I will see you through it. He shall not annoy you." "Thanks, I will. Are you going to work to-day upon that canvass?" "No, not to-

day, Jenny, it would only bother you, and I want to go to Barnes. There might perhaps be gipsies on the common, and if there are, I then can pick a background of tents and stock-in-trade, to suit the picture. So if you'll come along, my 'gipsy beauty,' we'll start at once." "I don't mind if I do," was Jessie's answer. "Well, run upstairs, and put your bonnet on, while I look out a block. Just black and white will do for what I want."

So, catching a train at the Brixton station, they were soon on the common, when looking round him he saw there were three encampments there, and they went up to the nearest one. But there were only some youngsters about, who were rolling on the grass—the men, they said, had gone off to Islington with a horse, and the women to Battersea, to some of their tribe there, who were in the basket line, and who worked the suburbs.

They went on therefore to the next lot, who were all there — the women smoking, and the men making clothes-pegs. They were a roughish lot, however, and badly grouped; and as he did not care to stick a van in his picture, they passed on to those beyond them. Yes, those would do. The chance arrangement of their tents was decidedly picturesque, and the hideous yellow van was absent. So, leaving Jessie in a mossy hollow, with a picture-paper for company, he drew near to them and began to sketch.

The day was hot, and Jessie, left alone, looked through the pictures and began to read; but soon she nodded—she had scarcely slept all night—when some slight sound—a stone rolled down, or some dry stick that cracked, half roused her up; and through the gorse before her, she saw two gleaming eyes there, staring at her! In an instant she was up, in perfect terror; but the gorse

bent down, and two strong arms were round her.

"So, so, my beauty! What, we've met again? You're caught at last. Now don't cry out; if there's one word I'll choke you! Sit down and hear now what I've got to say—your fancy-man is yonder—here in this hollow, where he cannot see us. You won't? I'll make you. Ah! you dare to scream. Now, stir not for your life." And down he dragged her, and held her there, one hand upon her mouth. "Lie still, I tell you! You shall hear me out. I loved you madly, and I love you still—have all these years, although you cast me off. Swear now you'll have me; swear, before he comes, or 'twill be the worse for you. I've got some money, and I can have some more. I'll leave the camp, I will, and then be tidy. See what you've made me!"

"I did not make you what you are, John

Lewis," said Jessie, struggling. "Loose, loose me! or I'll scream." "You won't! I'll stop your mouth, you handsome creature. I never kissed you, but I'll kiss you now. Then hear me out," said he, as she resisted. "Let by-gones be by-gones, and marry me. I'll use you well—I swear I'll use you well. You soon can give your fancy-man the slip."

"You villain, let me go!" said she, still struggling; but Lewis grasped her tighter than before.

"What's this—a wedding ring?" said he. "Then he's your husband?" "What's that to you? No, he is not my husband." "Then what brings you here with him, mock modesty? You can't reply. Well, never mind. I see! Come, kiss me and be friends."

"I won't, I tell you."

"Oh, I'll hold you till you do. Well, say you'll meet me then, and live with me,

as we can't marry; and I won't hurt you, and I'll let you go—though I shall track you. You don't slip me again; not if I know it!"

"Never!" cried Jessie, as she still kept struggling.

"Then if you don't I'll kill you, for he sha'n't have you."

"Not if you kill me, you—you wretched villain! Release me, or I'll scream! Oh, Harry! Harry!" "Kiss me, I tell you! Down with your hands, then, and let me kiss you."

A sharp short struggle, and her strength gave way, and as her senses failed, her name was spoken, and her lips were pressed; and as two arms clasped her, down she fell and fainted.

When she came to herself again she found that the one in whose arms she was lying, was Anderson. He had heard her scream

and cry, and rushing off, saw Lewis kiss her, and then bound away, as he caught sight of him; over the bushes and on through the gorse, straight for the river.

"There, it's all right, Jenny," said Harry; "Now don't distress yourself; the wretch is gone. I ought not to have left you. The same man, evidently, who stopped you in the Park—that scoundrel Lewis. It never crossed my mind he would be with gipsies, as I presume he is, with that lot yonder. I've got my flask—here, have a drop of sherry; and when you are rested then we will get on." But he did not let her stay long there; for, seeing the fright she was in, he thought it best to get her back home again as soon as possible; so giving her his arm, he returned for his block, which he had flung away when he heard his name called; and then, proceeding onwards with her, he

called at the camp, she sitting down the while in sight of him.

"Look here, you gipsy fellows," said he, "that vagabond companion of yours—Lewis—has been insulting this lady." "We knows nothin about him. He arnt one o' we," replied the man who was spoken to. "No, but he is with you, and I have a great mind to go back to town and get a warrant for him, and have him arrested this very evening—the scoundrel!" "Not here you won't." "Then I can at Epsom—that's where you are off to, and all your tribe, for knock-em-downs and fortunes." "Maybe we are." "And where to then? because, if back here, why, I'll have him up." "Down in the country, to the old Green Lanes—our summer quarters; so you needn't touch him." "Well, tell him this from me, then: if he once dares to do the like again, or interfere, I'll break his head, and each bone in his body.

You'll say that much?" "We will; he's useful to us like amongst the horses. Don't get him lagged. He won't be here again till come November, if then. Where our tribe is, is in his native parts, miles off from here."

So it ended at that; and Harry went home with Jessie, and stayed with her till it was late; and as this second meeting with Lewis had quite unnerved her, he arranged to come across in the morning early, and paint there on the morrow.

When he arrived—which he did to breakfast, lest Frank might call upon him, and so stop him—Jessie's face betrayed more anxiety than ever, for she had just received, by the first post, a letter, and from the very man himself—Lewis. It was signed with his name, and she knew his writing. All it said was this: "I did not mean to hurt you, Jessie, but you see I've tracked you.

Be reasonable, and think well of it; and when I call, be quite prepared to come. Ten years, you know, is very long to wait —I can't wait longer."

"How on earth could the vagabond have got your address in this time?" said Harry. "He must have followed us, and come on with us in the same train." "I see no other way," was Jessie's answer. He did no such thing though; but in going back again to the tents, after he had watched them off the common, he picked up the envelope of the letter that she had from Harry that morning, and thus discovered her address. It had dropped out of her pocket with her handkerchief when she had sat there crying, after Harry came to her; but as Jessie had the letter itself safe, and was in the habit of burning envelopes, such a solution, however, never occurred to her. "Well," said Anderson, "there's one thing pretty clear now;

you must leave here, Jenny, and that at once, or the fellow may bother you." "But how can I leave?" said Jessie. "You must," said Harry, "for your own peace of mind. Not that I think he will come here, but he may come; and if he does not do so, the constant fear of his coming, would soon make you as nervous as a kitten.

"Look here, Jenny, we will just run down to Brighton, and think it over. There's a train I think—a stopping train—at twelve, and an express at two. Suppose we catch the twelve, at London Bridge; there's lots of time! Now don't you stop to ponder, but pack at once what things you'll want there, say, to stay the week; and also pack what else you have, in case you don't return. It will be all under lock and key then, if I do send across for my things, which I think I may. To-morrow I'll look round, also on Thursday. Wednesday and Friday I go with

my friend to Epsom; but on Saturday I'll join you and stay the Sunday; and then on Monday morning we'll come back together. The change will do you good, and you'll be quiet. All else you leave to me. I'll see he does not find you, if he does come. So set to work and pack—you have just one hour—but don't now stay to tidy; and I will put the painting things together. They will then be ready, but all you need now will be one small box."

Thus was it fixed, and soon after midday they were both at Brighton. Some comfortable rooms were soon procured for her, just on the slope of the hill in the Queen's Road; the bow-window of her sitting-room having a clear view of the whole street, from the Station on the one side to the sea on the other; and there he left her in the evening, and returned to town; having told her to write in a day or two, and to telegraph at

once to him should there be any cause for alarm.

The next day he spent with Nelly and her friends, at the International in the morning, and at the Albert Hall at night; and on the morrow he and Frank got back from the Derby in time to meet her and her aunts at the Haymarket, where they saw Buckstone in a new piece. On Thursday he heard from Jessie. Nothing had happened, and she was very comfortable; so calling at Westbourne Terrace he went with them to Kew Gardens, and thence to Richmond; where they dined at the Star and Garter, had a stroll in the park, and tea in the terrace garden, where it overlooks the river and its pretty islands; a band playing under the elms adjoining, to Nelly's great delight. On Friday Frank was to have called for him to go to the Oaks, but he received a letter instead, to say they were going out of

town unexpectedly for a few days, so he must excuse him. As Harry had, however, made arrangements to meet friends there, and to bring a Fortnum and Mason's hamper and et ceteras with him for joint consumption, he jumped into a cab and went off alone; and then on the next evening joined Jessie at Brighton, and found her all the better for sundry dips in the sea and the week's quiet.

As it was a nice evening, they turned out at dusk for a stroll up the King's Road and a sniff of the sea; and as the band was playing, they went upon the pier. After they had sat there for some time, "Confound the people, what a lot there are," said Harry; "sweep, sweep, sweep; they brush one's knees at every step they take. Let us go round to the back, Jenny; I want a weed; and we will sit and see the moonlight on the water." So they turned the

corner, and sat there all alone, behind the screen and looking on the water.

While Jessie was talking of old times, and Anderson was smoking, voices he knew startled him, for by putting his hand behind him he could almost have touched the speakers.

"He is really a very good fellow," said the gentleman, "and I like him immensely." "Yes," said the lady, "he is indeed, and so very kind and thoughtful. I am sure at least that I have every reason to speak well of him." "And inclination too, I think. You are smitten. Shall I tell uncle James?" "How dare you?" was the reply; "you tiresome tease."

"Let us move to the other end, Jenny," said Harry; "the wind cuts here, and perhaps you'll feel it." They did so. It was getting too hot for him, for those who sat close by were Frank and Nelly; and just then, under

existing circumstances, it was decidedly inconvenient for him to have encountered them. It was evident to him that they were staying there; but as Brunswick Square was west and Queen's Road east, if he waited till they left the pier, he might escape meeting them.

"Would you like to stay as long as the band plays, Jenny, as it is so pleasant here?" "I should," said Jessie, "if you wish to stay. How beautiful it is, that moonlight on the water!"

When Nelly returned from Richmond on the Thursday night there was a letter awaiting her. It was from her uncle James, at Brighton, pressing her and Frank to come down there on the morrow, as there was a flower show in the neighbourhood, and to stay over Sunday with them; so, as Nelly was fond of flowers, Frank, like a good brother, gave up his pleasure for hers, and

they started. The doctor had a consultation on the next evening, and Mrs. Hamilton a headache, so Frank and Nelly went to the pier alone, little thinking that one they knew was sitting close behind them.

Jessie knew nothing as to the Hamiltons, for in giving her, on his return from Eymor, details as to her father, and the finding of the handkerchief by her brother George—which made her determine she would henceforth be "dead" to all of them—Anderson had only mentioned the name of his own uncle, who was, he said, the rector there. And in this determination, in which she persisted, Jessie was strengthened by his own observation,—that as he should be frequently at his uncle's, he could from time to time bring her word how they were at Landimoor; and if occasion required she could then make herself known to them.

They stayed until the closing of the pier,

when, unobserved, he saw her home, and then went to the "Bedford," where he had a quiet smoke, and thought things over.

The result was this; that when he called upon her on the Sunday morning he suggested, as the place would so soon be filled with excursionists, they should go out of town at once, to spend the day at Lewes. So there they went; looked round the castle ruins, dined at the inn—the "White Hart"—at the end of the main street, where there is such a fine old staircase and panelling; and then, after going together to evening service at St. Michael's, they got back to Brighton, he calling for her the next morning, on his return to town, by the through express at 9.45.

While in the train, he told her that which he had not named before; that just as he was driving off the course on Friday evening, he saw Lewis, who shouted out to him, as

he slashed him with his whip, "Ah! will you? Brixton's a pretty place, and nineteen a good number. That's one for you, Mr. Painter." So it was finally decided between them, that besides changing her rooms, it would be well to change her name, to stop all clue.

"What do you say to 'Barbara Lovell, the Gipsy Beauty,' eh, Jenny?" "The former, if you like, Harry," said Jessie, "but certainly not the latter." "So be it then," said he, "I have tacked the name to the picture, and you keep it." So as "Barbara Lovell" she was henceforth known.

Her own things and his were fetched from Brixton, and taken with precautions, and an exchange of cabs, to the new rooms he had engaged for her in a side street at Notting Hill; where she would, as he said, be nearer to him, and also to his studio.

Lewis did call, and in the following week,

but the bird had flown; and all the information he could obtain from the landlady, was that the boxes were labelled "Folkstone," so she supposed they were gone there—but that was too far for Lewis; so he had to bide his time again.

In the course of the ensuing week, after Nelly had been the round of the picture galleries, and up the river and down the river, and had seen, besides, most that was to be seen of the sights of London, she and Frank returned to Eymor; their aunts promising to come down and spend Christmas with them; and Anderson telling them that he was going out for a couple of months' sketching, but that he should be again in Herefordshire in the autumn, when he hoped to take back with him "some more of Miss Hamilton's pictures." For the snow scenes he had obtained a customer, and they had fetched a fair price. Really Nelly, for a

young beginner, was getting on famously—but all the old women on the common shared the benefit of it.

They were not forgotten either when she went away pleasuring, as on this and other occasions some little present for each of them "from London" duly testified. Nor was young Bob forgotten by Frank or Nelly, to his decided satisfaction, when they called on him on their way through Worcester, and found him full of the coming holidays, and what he meant to do then.

There was a bad time evidently at hand for those at Eymor, in the matter of continual scoutings and hunting-up of that precocious juvenile, and a bad time too with daily lessons for Peterkin, the magpie. Things did not promise well either for the farm hack, as Bob had settled it in his own mind, after his performances at the wedding on Kicking Jenny and Little Alice, that he

was not going to be put off with Gipsy the donkey any longer; for if Nell would not let him have the pony altogether, he would ride Dapple Grey—his father's or Frank's consent to such equestrian exploit never being thought of. What Bob wished to do he generally did do.

The day after their return was a very busy day with Nelly, as she had to see how all the cottagers were after her three weeks' absence, and to distribute her presents; and then, able better than ever, as she thought, to "see" colour, through her visits to the galleries, she settled down steadily to the painting, more determined than ever that she would do all she could to make something of it.

CHAPTER VI.

"BUT I'M MUCH TOO YOUNG," SAID PRETTY MARY MOSS.

JUNE was over and July come, and Nelly was at work again; and the chief topics of conversation were haymaking and shearing, for the sheep had been washed, the clover was cut, and the grass was ready. The crop was good, and that in the big meadow splendid, for that which the flood left had forced it; and as the Midsummer storms were abating, Frank hoped, if the sun kept out and the work was pulled into, they should be able to get it ricked up by St.

Swithin's. Anyway they would set six mowers to work, and get plenty of strength to it.

When Nelly returned from Town, the beauty of the country surprised her. The sky was brighter, the greens were softer, the blossoms were thicker; foxgloves were on the banks, honeysuckles were in the lanes, and wild roses were everywhere. Forget-me-nots were blue by the water, the gorse and the bonnie broom were golden on the commons, and the beautiful blooms of the bind-weed were white on the hedges. The long grasses clipped the feet in the meadows, and the branching ferns in the dingles rustled as you went through them—all was abundance; the year was in its full and summer glory—young life and greenery, birds' songs and flowers.

And now that the hottest month had set in, the deep blue in the sky was paling

with the heat of it, and the full soft greens were dusking. The roads were white with dust, and the poppies were ablaze with scarlet; the cattle were in the water for its coolness, or under the elms for their shade, for there was a general heat and stillness, and tree-shadows were no longer tremulous. The sheep lay about, and the dogs were quiet, and open windows were a necessity.

But though it was too hot in the day to get about much, at sundown it was delicious, for then came the wafts from the fields of bean blossoms, and the scent of the limes in the lanes; the smell of the thyme on the hills, and the songs of the birds that woke up; and the sound of the sheep-bell again.

It was the first week in July, and scythes were being looked up and whetted, for the time in that quarter had come for mowing. "Are you going to help us with the hay this time, Mary?" said Frank, as he called

at the keeper's. "I hope so, sir," was the reply; "shall you want me?" "Yes, and glad to get you, for every hand will be useful; and you are the best I know to keep them all in good humour." "When do you begin, sir?" "Monday, the day after to-morrow, if we can do so; and we must be at it early, so as to get a good bit of it down by breakfast time, for you people to ted before dinner; and then we shall be able to hack it and cock it by leaving-time, so as to be well forward for the mowers on the morrow; when I hope, if the weather holds, we shall be able to ted the rest, and shake the cocks out and move it, that we may double-winrow the best of it in the afternoon." "That will be getting on with it, sir, and we can do it if it's dry." "Yes, for if it is, and we can then shake it about a time or two, we shall, I fancy, be able to get it together by the evening; if at least

we can have a good drying wind, or the sun is enough for us. We ought certainly, with anything like work and weather, to begin to carry on Wednesday evening, or Thursday morning; for I think we shall have enough hands to keep pace with the mowers; if not, one of them, or two if needed, must knock off." "Then you will want me about nine, I suppose, sir?" "Yes, if you can, Mary; but don't be later." So on the Monday morning Mary was there in the hayfield, and looking as rosy as ever.

The morning looked promising, for the sunrise had been red, and a soft yellow haze was still hanging on the meadows. There was no sway in the poplars, and but a tremor in the aspens, and the corn was unrippled, and the trees were still; and the tree-shadows crept out from the hedgerows steadily and evenly. The swallows were too high for wet, but too low for coolness, and

but the faintest of cloud-tints could be seen on the hills. It would be a hot day, decidedly, and the hay would "make," and there would be no lack of strength in the meadow.

The mowers had commenced early, and there were six of them at it, so the swathes were many by breakfast time. All the women were there, and some extra hands as well; but as they wanted five to a mower, Aaron, and Jem, and Burton, and Tom Baylis, and Byfield came too, to make up the number; and Frank was amongst them, doing his share also, and keeping them up to it; for besides the mowers there were thirty in the field, for it was a big one, and the hay was wanted to be got in quickly.

What a charm there is about haymaking, and that ring of the scythes as they are whetted, and the swish of their sweep as

they go! How much may be said about it, but how little that is new! It is a pretty scene and a busy one.

By baiting-time the work was well forward, and by sundown they had kept pace with the mowers; for the work went well, as the evening had been a merry one; for, as the women said, "When our Mary be ooth us we bin niver dull;" Mary Moss being a little body who had plenty to say for herself, and she had a good ringing laugh with it too; and she could and would sing all the day long, if they asked her, for she was always merry, and always willing. And if the work seemed to flag a bit she would wake them all up with a whistle—"the gipsy whistle," as she called it; a long, shrill, piercing one, that made them straighten themselves, as their hearts bumped; and then, bursting into one of her wild rollicking songs, that had all sorts of strange words in it, and

probably a chorus of "said the Romany Rye to Rawnee," the meadow would ring again with the laughs of the women and the cheers of the men; and Frank encouraged it; for he knew when hearts were light, hands were quick, and that nothing helped work so much as good humour.

"Well, it is hot, and no mistake!" said Frank, as he stuck his fork in the ground and mopped himself. "What a day we have had! And we shall have another to-morrow too, by the look of it. Rest a bit now, you women, and come and wet your lips; and then we'll go at it again, and have another shake out."

"Now then," said he, as he sat on the bank in the shade, with the rest around him, "pour out, Burton. Mrs. Gould, you are for cold tea, I think; and you, Mary? Here you are, then. Pritchett, you're another tea-woman. Thank you, Tom. Pass it on to

the women. There's Mrs. Butler looking very anxious; she likes her 'cy-der.' Never mind, Jane; you know we must have something to say. Here's a tot for you, Mrs. Roberts; drink it up and I'll fill it. There's Mrs. Turner, and Mrs. Potts, and Eliza, too, waiting. Your good men have worked well to-day, and they went into it early. Where's the pig-killer? Oh, there you are! Help yourself, Byfield, and pass the can on. Jem and Aaron look as though they could do a drop. I don't think, though we did 'tice you off, to-day, Jem, that you have lost much by the move, for it would have been quite too hot for the trout."

"Theyn keep, they ool, sur," said Jem; "though the weather dunna matter; a con catch em aany toime." "That's more than I can do then," said Frank. "How do you manage it, Jem?"

"Well, a oodna till iverybody, sur, but

ul till you—bluebottle 'em, sur; that bin it! When it's a blaazer, an that theer hot roight down atop on yer, as yer mun putt a lafe i' yer hat, ta saave yer braaines a fryin, an the waater bin that thur low an claer as yer con see ivery stone o' the bottom, dunna thee bother, sur, o' them maaide uns, thay be nohow; but catch some floies—loive uns, big blue uns, them as gits hon the mate—darn theer bodies—an stick one hon, an git behind a bush. Thin ef so be as yer lits him drap—quoietly, moind, quoietly—roun the corner, inter one o' them dape little pools wheer the waater's done a fizzlin, ef thee dussent lift him hout, an ivery trout as bin theer, Ise ate ma hat! It ba killin! —that's what it be, sur."

"Thank you for the hint, Jem; I'll try it. Pass your tot. Raybould, how are you getting on? Price, will you see to your wife, and the rest of the women there?

Here's some cold tea if you're out of it. How's your brother got?" "A inna much batter, an thank yer, sur." "Yer shoon gin him some elder tay," said Aaron, "ta maake him swaat; an some willer tay ta strengthen him." "A ool," said Price. "Theer's that un o' moine," said Mrs. Gould, "as have gotten a cuff a comin. Whaatn a gin 'm, Aaron?" Aaron was a man of the woods, and he was great in "simples." "Whaat? whoy, some loime blossom tay ta be sure; they be jist in, they be; that an some winterpick woine a shoon saay ood mend 'm. Bin thee oud feyther better it? a wan baddish." "No, a inna; laiste, a wanna whin a sid 'm; a swaals, an a has ta be sot hup i' the cheer, but a conna slape." "Poor mon," said Aaron, "poor mon! Well, a knows ta some junipers i' thun ood, an thee shast ha' some. That'll loighten the swalth, but thee bist too laate fur the slape, a

fears; but ef theer's a cuckoo laft, an thee const woir 'm, an the meyster here ool lit ma catch a yar, a could soon git 'm slape, a knows, fur it bates all; theer's nothin loike a cuckoo in a yar skin, ef a be laide on the chist. But ef thee conna, thee mun troy some poppy yuds: they bin foine, they be; or some hops i' the piller: them be proime."

"Oon they ha maany hops at oud Jemmy's?" said Mrs. Potts. "A dunna think they ool," said Liza, who had left there lately, as she could not "putt hup ooth" Miss Tabitha and Angelina any longer, "but a hanna sid 'm laaitely. A dunna harf do em, he dunna, the oud crab skinflint. They saays as a helps thun hops out at the brewins ooth some wood saage; an a bitters it that awaay; an a belaves it." "Roberts, hast tha sid aany o' them ghostisses laaitely?" said Burton. "No, a hanna," was the reply, "an a dunna waant to talk aboot 'em."

"Oh, I forgot," said the blacksmith, "it were thun oud ship-shearer; he be the ghost, mon. Foive foot ten, an a black un, wanna it, Baaylis, an in petticuts!" "Dunna, Bill, dunna," said Mrs. Davis, "a fears it wan Jessie. That were a baddish happen, that wan." "Is," said Burton, "it wan, ef ween heerd the roights on it." "A belaves thun oud mon be gone choildish loike, an quare," remarked Mrs. Woodruff. "Youm roight," said Aaron.

"I say, Aaron," said Frank, coming up to them with the can in his hand, "was it true you stopped a fox in, that day the hounds came?" "No it wanna, meyster," said the mole man, "but a knows who teld a." "I don't think you do," was the reply, "but hold your cup, and give your wife some; you'll have a drop more, Mrs. Woodruff, it won't hurt you? Well, Jones, so you've been round the hops, have you?

What do you think of them?" "Whoy, a thinks, meyster," said the drier, "as how theer'l be a toidy lot on em fur the kiln, this atoime, bar bloight; they looks moighty koind so fur, an they bin a taakin hold wellish. But a sid some woires amongst 'em, sur, as mayhap and mebbe, an God sind it, ool be ta forrard bym-by." "Yes, I know; some thick and purply ones. That's you women, that is," said Frank, "you ought only to have tied the green ones. They'll be in bine now long before the rest. You should be careful." However, the tyers held their tongues, for they knew they were guilty, but they had had the sun in their eyes, and had been at work with their bonnets tilted. "Theer's a castin-tool laft i' the ind o' the last alley, sur; ud harf a moind ta bring him." "Yes, it's Austin's, I saw it, he's been out-speeching—I told him of it. Here, have some cyder, Jones, and get your breath

right by picking. I fancy we shall be able to keep you on stiffish." "A hopes so, plase God, an a trusts they'll sell well."

"Now then," said Frank, "if you women have done with the cold tea and the 'cy-der,' we'll go into it again, I think we shall be able to finish grass-cocking that first lot, if we look alive." So once more the work went merrily; and he left them at it when the horn blew, which was a sign he was wanted.

"That be a brick ta work ef yer loike," said Whittaker. "Yes," said Charles Davis, "our young master can stick at it, he can; we shall be nice an forward for to-morrow." "That be thanks to we chaps, that be, fur a good start an a keepin-on sweep," said Potts. "Ud mow alang o' any mon, bar swoipes; a aacre a daay, and do it asy." "An so ool I; or shear o' any mon," said Baylis—who was determined not to be out-

done—"o' saame turrums—good cy-der, an bar swoipes. Uz done two in twanty minutes! cotchd em, shore em, an toied thun ool up, dacent and proper; an ul do it agin wi' ony mon, wi' a minnite to spar, theer now!" "Whoy dussent tha mark 'em, Tom, when tha shores 'em," said Shepherd. "They usen to i' our paarts, an they does now, a belaves."

"Thin they knowst nothin' aboot it," said Baylis, decisively, "an yer ma tell 'em a saays so. It be this awaay, hedger. Ef so be as yer marks 'em as soon as they be shored, youn burn 'em; but ef yer waaites till yer dips the lambs—saay a' noine daays arter, whin orl the tics as wan laft o' the ewes be agotten honter they—thin youm roight, ecos theer skins han got the tender hoff 'em, so they oona sore; an roighter still ef yer knowst yer bis'ness, as you'll thin bile some frash liquor i' the pitch, that the

hate on it mebbe timpered, and a good print laft. Ef yer han it too hotted, it thins the pitch loike, and tha mark dunna stand." "A see," said Shepherd; "an now yer naames it, uz sid it offen; the marks wan paale, sartin, an 'em had ta be done agin on occasion." "Charlus," said Aaron, "gie us a look in lad whenst tha coomes 'our waay, uz gotten summut ta show tha—some funny yuds an things as uz bin a cuttin' o' the cork from them oud baach trees; they be rum uns, lad, they be, as 'll amoose the gipsy parties. An a con show tha some urchins, lad, a lot on 'em oonder the whoite bame tree, o' the top o' the quarry, wheer the bee-orchis be a blossomin; an uz fund a misle-toe-oak, lad, too, i' thun ood, as yer conna see ivery daay; so a shall hev summut ta hastonish 'em ooth this atoime. What wan thy Betsy arter, Charlus, at the pool last noight?" "Some yellow flag for one thing," said Davis,

"for her toothache, and some horsetails for another, to clean her pewter and the platters." "Ah, I teld hur on it, but a thought hur wan awaitin fur somebody." "I don't know who'd have her," said Charles, "she's so freckled." "Let hur git some sundew thin, it be in blossom now; that'll cure 'em quickish." "I'll tell her," said Davis, "for I know she's anxious. She was on with her charms again on Midsummer Eve, so I heard the girls say; they were laughing about it." "Whaatn hur do thin, Charlus?" said Baylis. But there were women about, so Charles whispered him, and he and Aaron laughed.

"A knoust whaatn thee two bist a loffin at," said Mrs. Pritchett, "but theer be summut in it. Ef yer toies 'em roun the bed-post, an toies noine knots on 'em, the himage o' the mon 'll show afore marnin', ef so be as yer bin to marry. It bin a surer plan than

ayther the caake, or thun hemp sid; or laayin the cloth at midnoight an a lavin the doors hopen, ecos a knows them as ha troied it." "Didst thee get thy mon that awaay, Sapphira?" "None o' thy imperence, Aaron. No, a coomed o' his own accord, an a coorted ma reglar." "Whaatn a do, Aaron, for that lad o' moine?" asked Mrs. Austin. "Johnny?" "Is, poor lad, his nose blades offen, and it wakens 'm." "Dip some tow i' some nettle juice," said Aaron, "an putt it hup it; that'll settle it. How's thee sister gotten?" "Well, thank tha, Aaron, hur neck be batter. Hur blistered him wi' tha stone-crap, as yer telda; and hur taakes thun nettle sids reglar, twanty a daay, an a thinks they be a doin' on hur a power o' good; an hur poor leg too, he be batter, sense hur's used thun aggerimony." "Glad on it," said Aaron the medico, "ecos a staakes ma reppartashun whin a naames

a cure. A con bate the doctor, I con, though Burt be a good un; but a conna come up to me, he conna. Hur fancies that theer aggeromony, don't hur?" "A shoodst think hur dun jist; hur saays it smells loike a haperycot." "Dun the foxgloves grow as a gid yer?" "Faamous; but wan that theer true as yer teld ma, Aaron?" "True! yer dunna think ud desave a toidy married ooman loike thee, dust tha? No, it be quoite true. Whin the fox went to the roost a courtin, he putt 'em hon his paws to kivver his clays, so as not ta froighten the fowls whin a shookd 'ands ooth 'em; an so they be cal-led 'fox's gloves' to this adaay." "A sis," said Mrs. Austin, satisfied.

"Now whaat brings thee here, Tom?" said his mother, as that hopeful son of hers came into the meadow with Joe. "Yer bin to lave hoff work, the meyster saays. Didna yer hear ma a tankin?"

"A heerd somebody, but a didna know it wan at thun house; a shoon ha blown thun horn, and thin we'd aknowd." "A wan o' the staables," said Tom, "an a saays, 'tank 'em Tom, thun horn's i' thun house,' so a tanked, wi' the can an the stone, ta saave 'im agooin hin." "How be thee finger gotten, boykin?" said Aaron, alluding to a grip Tom got at the rook-shooting. "Oh, it ba well now," said Tom; "but a did boite ma, he did. A wan a loyin' hon his back, he wan, an a saayin 'quaak!' wi' his legs i' thun ar. 'Pick 'm hup, Tom,' saays the meyster; 'theer's another dead un;' an a picked 'm hup; but consume his oud body, a couldna drap 'm agin, a hung to ma. A thinkd, a did, as ef a wanna intoirely dead, as ud be quoiet, loike ma maggit, but a wanna." "A wish thy maggit ud sarve tha tha saame," said his mother, "thun oudacious crater. Drat the lad, theest

gotten a lamb, whaat's tha waant ooth a maggit?" "Now thin, who's agwain our waay?" said Rebecca. "Mary, bist thee aready?" "I must go round by the shop," said she. "Hur be agwain to meet Tom Norton, a knows," said Jem. "He be agotten quoite silly loike aboot tha; sense the dance i' the mill-medder uz a alleys a tankin arter tha." "If he is, I don't want him," said Mary; "he's too old for me." "Theest be an oud mon's darlin now, aspecs," said Turner. "No, I sha'n't," said she; "I don't mean to be anyone's darling; I'll stick as I am." "An waaite fur Gaarge Lawson," said Roberts; "that be the quaarter." "You know nothing about it," said Mary. "Come, now thin, lads; let's be a gettin hon," said Potts; "it be laaite, an we mun be at it early." And all coming out of the meadow together, they went their separate ways.

But when Mary Moss got to the first stile, Norton was sat there; and as he offered to wait while she went to the shop, and he would see her home afterwards, she could not well get out of him.

"I think you love me just one small bit," said he, as they went up the hill to the wood. "No I don't," said Mary. "But ever so little?" "Not a bit," said she. "That's right, my darling, speak your mind," said Tom. "But I can't say I do love you when I don't, you know; but I will try to be very sorry for you," said she, "if that will do you any good." "I think it would," said he, "for 'pity' is, they say, 'as good as love'—no, 'a king to love,' that's it." "But I can't pity you and love you too," said she. "And why not, Mary?" "Oh, I never thought of love." "Well, promise, and make that promise binding with a kiss." "No, not a kiss, Tom, that will never do.

We all know you of old. If you had one, you'd want a score directly." "No doubt," said Tom. "Then don't you ask again; I cannot have you. Besides, you're old enough to be my father!" "Oh, nonsense, Mary! I've got a good home and I'm doing well; I'd make you comfortable." "No, Tom, I can't. It's kind of you to ask me, but I can't." "Well, say you'll think of it, now Mary, do. I'll wait. You are but twenty-three, there's no time past!" "No, don't you press me, please. Come, let us part; the dogs are barking, and father might be coming." "Well, good night, Mary, then. You'll think of it? If I am old, I'm hearty." "But I'm much too young," said pretty Mary Moss; "I'll be your friend, Tom, but I can't be more. So now good night, for here is father coming!"

CHAPTER VII.

DOWN THE RIVER.—FRANK HAMILTON AND CLARA ARUNDELL.

THE hay-making was over, the shearing was finished, and the lambs were quiet; the sheep-fairs had commenced, and the hurdle makers were busy. The tenants had dined at the House, the longest day was past, and the corn was ripening; and now that the end of the month was at hand—July—Nelly reminded her brother Frank of his promise —"a row down the river when the work was over."

"Now when is it to be?" said she. "Will

Thursday suit you?" "Yes," said Frank, "if it will suit the parson." "Well, if you like to fix that day, I will go down to the Rectory at once and see about it; and if they can come I will ride on then," said Nelly, "to Bickley." "Very well," said Frank, "do so; and if you are not back soon I shall know, and I will go up after dinner, and arrange with my lot—Freeman, and Burgess, and Gilbert; but I believe any day this week will suit them."

So, soon afterwards, she went off on the pony, and when Frank met her on her return from her uncle's, she said that the Rectory people would come, and so would Annie, but Fred was out. Preparations were therefore made, the boats were cleaned —one was Frank's and the other was the miller's—the fishing-tackle was seen to, and the making of niceties was commenced by Nelly. She and Clara were going to sketch,

and Emma and Annie would read; while the gentlemen of the party, taking their rods with them, would do their best at the fishing in the morning, and then, in the afternoon, give the ladies their company in a ramble through the wood.

The spot they proposed going to was Hazel Hollow, five miles down the river, and a clear sweep all the way, as there was no weir from Wood's to Werter's. It was a great nutting-place in the season, and consisted of a hazel dell, a fern dale, and a dingle; with a brook, and a waterfall, and some limestone rock; and close to it, in the river, was a great bed of water lilies; and there was better fishing near there than you could get for miles. There was an old quarry, too, in the dale, with a shed in it, which was handy for shelter.

The morning being fine, and all assembled, they started; Clara and Emma Arundell in

the one boat, with Frank and Gilbert, and Nelly and Annie Hamilton in the other, with Freeman and Burgess; the former having brought his cornet with him, at the special request of the ladies. Young Bob, who was at home for the holidays, was got rid of by the offer of "a mount for the day" on the farm hack, which suited that youth quite as well as the water; and his father proposed going up with the Rector in the dog-cart, and back in the same way—an arrangement which all thought would be admirable, especially on the return journey, as it had to go up there with the eatables and the drinkables, and the rugs and the wraps; Charles, the groom, and Jane, the housemaid, being commissioned to see to them, lay the dinner, and wait at "table." Mrs. Hamilton did not care for the water, and they would be too late in the evening for Mrs. Arundell to venture. It was just

the morning for the river, hot and sunny, with a luminous haze on the meadows, and the sky one canopy of thin bright blue.

"A pleasant day to you, ladies," said the miller, as they pushed off from his landing-stage, with a hamper of crocks in each boat, which had been sent down there to lighten the dog-cart; "I hope you will have it fine." "Thank you, Wood; I think we shall," said Frank. "I hope Mrs. Wood and Mrs. Warrilow are well." "Yes, thank you; we have got Jenny amongst us again." "Now, then, Freeman," said Frank, "wake the echoes, will you, my boy, with some of your best notes; and as you are trumpeter, lead the way." So down the river they rowed, Nelly pulling stroke for stroke with Burgess; while Freeman, who could play well, commenced his selection of good pieces, for the benefit of the ladies.

The coolness and freshness of the water,

shadowed as it was by the trees which overhung it, and by the woods which went down to it, was most delightful; and it was all the pleasanter from its contrast to the hot white glare of the distance, and the blaze of sun-light on the fields around them. You could see how hot it was by the cattle, which were all on the toss and the gallop —the cows, and the calves, and the colts; and by the sheep there, that were stamping and shaking their heads, or herding, with their noses close down to the ground; for the gad-flies were about, and they knew it. Cows, here and there, were at the water, too, and in it to their hides, under the bushes and under the trees, until woke up by the sound of the cornet; when, with a great plunging and a splashing, they would rush up the bank, and then turn and bellow, angry that they were started.

The name of the river is a fitting one—

"the willowy, twisting Teme"—for there, in the midst of the hop-yards, it is willowed and withied for miles; and so twisted that you may give a boating party half-an-hour's law, and in twenty minutes meet them across the fields, by easy walking. But this frequent twist is the charm of it, for the country up there, through which it winds, is so surpassingly beautiful, that the views one gets at every bend are most lovely; diversified in foreground, varied in mid-distance, grand in backing.

For miles and miles the river winds along through richest pastures; by hop-yards, orchards, corn and meadow land; between high hills and under hanging woods; now dark with alders, and then light with willows; here, open to the sky, and wide and shallow; there, shut in by thick leafage, dusk and deep. A breadth of it, all blue, and grey, and white; a length, steel-tint and olive, indigo and

brown; here, shingle, pebbles, and flat golden sand; there, great rough boulders, swept down by the floods. You round the first turn, and pass through an arch, grey-green, and white —half in the sky, the rest down in the water —where meeting willows show their silver sides. You reach the next, on either side a meadow, tall reeds for border, and the banks all leaves. You bend again—a perfect leafy tunnel, the only light, a glimpse of white cloud where a branch is broken. The next twist, maybe, shows a reach of distance, wedge-shaped and blue, between two sloping hills; or some grey tower, half hidden by old yews, and rooks about it; or else some cottages, low, white, and thatched, by gorsy commons; or timbered houses, set in greenery, fronted with flowers, and well framed by trees —the change is endless, and each one is pleasing.

And as the merry party pulled down the

stream—so cool, so shady, and so well shut in—each one there was delighted with the beauty of it, for it was most enjoyable; for there were flocks of warblers singing in the sedge, and in the willows little willow-wrens; and the titmice were twittering in the osier-beds, swinging head downwards, darting at the flies. The coots were paddling, too, and bobbing in the water, out with their dusky brood; and young swallows on the wing were flitting by; and there was a cheeping of young birds, and a flutter of butterflies; and bees were busy at the honeysuckles. The wheat was purpling, the barley dulling, and the oats were whitening, quivering as they grew; and partridge-broods were running in the corn. There was a sweet smell from the hills of wild thyme, and delicious sniffs of meadow-sweet by the water. The gorse was dazzling, foxgloves were ablaze, and ferns were bending in cool nooks and crannies; and with the

ripple of the river came the tinkle of the brooks, for they now were shallow, so their move was musical. Tall timber grew where dusty roads were nigh, and thickened hedge-rows shut in leafy lanes; and cottage-children, racing in the fields, gave life and sound, and merry animation. The row was all too short, each wished it longer; but fresh beauties were in store when they landed—green fields, thick herbage, blue sky, running water; rock, wood, and water-fall, and ferns and flowers.

"Hillo, Frank," said Gilbert, as the ladies departed, and the fishermen settled to it, "what on earth have you brought that cow's-horn for? Why, there are holes in it! Are you going to do the Swiss business, my boy, and call us to dinner with it, or do you think of burlesquing friend Freeman and the cornet; or is it an implement of warfare, to knock the fish on the head when you've caught them?" "Neither," said Frank; "guess

again. Here, old fellow, I'll let you into the secret. Smell," said he, taking out the cork at the end of it, and putting it to Gilbert's nose. "Confound you, Frank! what the deuce is that?" said Gilbert, as he cuffed at a blue-bottle that hit him on the nose. "Bait," said Frank. "Bait?" "Yes; it's full of them. Talk of fishing, my boy! I flatter myself I shall beat the lot of you, though I am young at fly-fishing." "But you surely don't mean to say you are going to fish with blue-bottles?" "Yes, I do, though. It's a wrinkle. Jem, the fisherman, put me up to it."

"The poaching old vagabond," said Gilbert; "we shall hear next of your using lob-worms, for that's one of Jem's ways. He hangs a lot of them on a tough line, and fastens one end of it to a tree and the other to a big stone, which he throws over the river at night into the bushes; then, going round to the

other side of the stream, he makes that end fast, sets the line so that it just touches the water, and leaves it. By daylight he's at it, and if there are good fish on it, he wades in and gets them. They say there will often be a whole row of them, and big ones too." "But can he catch them in that way?" "Yes; trout especially—two or three pounders, that, too cute to feed in the day and get caught, float up on the feed at night. I have myself often caught trout at night—but with the fly, mind, and that when I could not see the water—by striking the moment I felt the rod thrill; and fine fish too; and I have had them then and there broiled for supper." "Herbert is a good hand at the trout, I think." "Yes, he is; but he is no true trout-fisher: he uses lobs and minnows. I never use anything," said Gilbert, "but the fly, and I am content with three, which I use as the water is. Give me a twelve-foot rod, and

twenty yards of line, and an extra line, or gut-length, round my hat, with some yellow-duns, red palmers, and white moths, and a few materials for making in case of a good rise at a special fly, and a supple wrist will do the business."

"To carry a whole heap of flies i na pocket-book is all bosh! It loses time, Frank, bothering with them, and there's nothing in it. If you have white for darkness, red for shade, and black for lightness, you will seldom want much more, especially if it is a warm and cloudy day, with enough breeze to stir the water. They won't rise when the rain is coming, but as soon as it is over, and the insects come out again, then, my boy, you'll get hold of them, if you just drop your fly under the hanging banks where the water is in shadow; though the best place for the big ones is where the stones split the rapids, as they wait there

for the food swirled down to them. I wonder you have not done more with the fly; it beats all angling." "You are right," said Frank, "but at present I am but a young hand at it." "However," said Gilbert, "unless it clouds over presently—and there seems little chance of it—the trout won't trouble us to-day; or rather we shan't trouble them, for it is hot enough to fry them, let alone us; and the water is so low and clear that you can see every pebble at the bottom of it, so I for one shall do a pipe and wait events." "And so shall I," said Frank, "but it will be with the rod in my hand. It is just the very morning for these blues—hot, bright, and sunny." "Well, go to work then, and let's see you throw; I doubt the blue-bottle. I'll stick behind this bush and do a smoke; I'll wait for clouds before I whip the water."

So Frank got the tackle in form, and

keeping behind a stub, and as far from the side as he could, he threw, dropping the fly over the bushes where there was a swirl round the corner. "A rise, by Jove!" said Gilbert, and a trout was landed; a good-sized fish, almost two pounds in weight, a speckled beauty! Another at the next throw quickly followed, about a pound; and then a third, and afterwards a fourth—best trout of all: a good three-pounder, and a nice bright fish, which Frank played for some minutes, and then landed. "Confound it, Frank, you'll have all the fish in the river. Let me have a go in," said Gilbert, "and see if I can do it." So he took the rod and struck. A trout again, though smaller than the last, but very silvery. "A first-rate bait," said he, "and no mistake." "Yes," said Frank, "it is; but it is just the time for it, and just the water—bright, still, and blazing. It is the only fly, Jem

says, that they will take then." "Well, as it seems such a coaxer, I expect it is a killing one at all times." "Jem says not, and that they only take it as a relish." "It is certainly worth knowing, Frank. Do you mind me going in for another one?" "Not a bit of it. You understand the theory and the practice of it; I don't, though I hope to. Go on; it will be a lesson to me to watch you." And Gilbert did go on, and kept landing the trout so quickly that he said, "Look here, old fellow, this won't do; I shall have all your fish. Take the rod, and we'll share the blues." So then they both fished. "Now," said Gilbert, "I will back us to catch more fish than those other fellows; but if we do, keep dark as to bait." "All right," said Frank.

Freeman, who was angling, had got up amongst the stones; and Burgess, who cared little for fly, but was great at trolling, had

gone down some distance to the lilies—as the small fry were quiet — with a good-sized dace and a bullet; and there, letting it drift under the bed of leaves, a pike was struck, and it proved a big one, which took some time to play. But as Burgess was unable to use the net for bushes, he slipped down bodily into the water, when he at last got him to the side; and with the rod in his left hand, pinned the pike over the eyes with his right thumb and finger, where the strong cartilage gave him a good grip; but the fish shaking his head, and trying to get down again, freed himself. But he soon found a hand under him, and himself upon the bank—Burgess flinging him—where he got a hit on the back of the head with the butt of the landing-net, which settled him. When they put him in the scales at night, he turned them at ten pounds. Down stream there was another bed of lilies, and

Burgess went there; and after a good wait, he got a good play, and landed another, that weighed eight pounds. All Freeman caught was one stray little trout; he said a pike had "scattered them." Nelly and her friend Clara had gone off sketching; and her sister and Annie Hamilton were fern hunting.

And when, at two o'clock, the sound of the cornet brought them together again, they found, as they got to the green hollow where the cloth was laid, that Mr. Hamilton and the Rector were there, and waiting; the pretty housemaid and Charles the groom, busying about, and getting it all together in due order. Burgess was last, but it was excusable, for he had further to come than the others; and when he did come up, he had a stout stick on his shoulder, and three pike on it—the third being but a six-pounder, which he had got at the second lily-bed; "a tidy weight," said he, "with the sun

a blazer. Nelly chose the spot for dinner, and she could not have done better, for it was green and cool, and soft with moss; with trees above it, and a brook by it, which, as being handy for the claret, the hamper was put there. Nothing was forgotten, and the salt and the corkscrew were there; and as Jane had received her instructions from Nelly, as to the laying out and divers matters, when all was ready it looked very pretty, as there was plenty of sparkle, and light, and glitter; and the "table" was decorated with ferns and garden flowers.

"Now, then," said Mr. Hamilton, "as there is ample room, and waiters handy, we will all sit down together." The dinner, as all such dinners are, was a very jolly one; lots of laughing and plenty of chatter, and the popping of corks was in the ascendant. "Miss Nelly," said the Rector, I shall challenge you to a glass of cham-

pagne." "Miss Arundell," said Mr. Hamilton, "shall we join them?" "Who made the pigeon, Hamilton?" "I did," said Nelly. "The best pie," said Mr. Arundell, "I have tasted for a long time." "Oh, our Nell is not a bad cook, I can tell you," said her father; "all we have here is due to her. If she is not ornamental she's useful. Never mind, Nell, lass, better be good than pretty; unless, like some I see here, you can be both good and pretty." "Ladies, on your feet!" said Nelly. "Vino—vino—'in vino veritas,' that's it, is it not, Mr. Arundell? 'Truth in wine.' Take some more champagne, papa; it is doing you good." "I will with you, you saucy puss; so hold your glass."

"Charles, don't move that hamper; keep it in the water, and bring the claret out as we want it; it can't be too cool on a day like this. Parson! there's Bass, and stout, and bottled perry; or do you prefer

sherry, or claret?" "Thanks, Bass by all means, for I like my beer." "And so do I. The ice is by you there. Jane, if you will hand the sweets down there, I think those gentlemen will be able to persuade the ladies to do justice to them. Gilbert; how are you getting on?" "Famously," was the reply. "Burgess; will you take care of yourself? Frank; I hope you are seeing to friend Freeman?" "Oh, he is big enough and old enough to look out for himself; but he is too busy talking to the ladies here to be able to do much." "Don't believe it, Mr. Hamilton; we are merely having a little consultation as to tunes, I being trumpeter." "'Love not' is a good one," said Frank, who had noticed his attention to bright Annie Hamilton. "Yes," said Freeman, who had not been blind to Frank's partiality for the pretty Clara, "and so is 'Fondly I'm dreaming, love, ever of thee.'"

"You are right," was the reply. "Miss Arundell, you will sing that for us, will you not, as we row back up the river?" "Yes, if you like," said Clara, "if Mr. Freeman will accompany me: I love the cornet." "I hope you don't include the cornet player," said Frank, quietly, as he took wine with her.

"How have you people been amusing yourselves all this morning?" said the Rector. "You, I see, Mr. Burgess, have given evidence of your skill. What have you done, Mr. Frank?" "Charles," was the reply, "look in that basket there, and turn them out on a dish, and take them to Mr. Arundell." "Well, you have been fortunate," said the Rector; "they are beauties." "Yes, we have; that is my lot and Gilbert's." "Now, Mr. Freeman, you are very silent there. Pray what have you to show?" "I caught but one," said he, "and threw him in. How they caught what they did, I can't make out." But not a word

was said about the blue-bottle. "Miss Nelly, you and Clara have been painting, I hear." "We have, Mr. Arundell; I suppose I must show them." "Do, please; yours, I know, will be worth seeing." "Yes, and Clara's too; she has done it very well."

"Where did you put those, Annie," said Emma Arundell. "Just in the brook at the corner. I'll fetch them." "There," said Miss Emma, as she began to lay them out, "and that is the result of our little peregrinations. You will please to attend, papa, because I think we have done our share. That's hart's tongue, and fine too—we got it by the brook; and there's some lady-fern that we found in the little hollow under the waterfall. Is it not delicate and feathery? And that—smell it—is some hay-scented fern; and there is some soft prickly shield-fern; and here—look at this—a bit of beech-fern actually; we got it in the wood. That is a bit of the common

polypody, that we get off the shed; and that is the limestone variety, which we picked in the quarry; and there—the best last—bee-orchis, papa. That was from the top of the quarry. Now is it not pretty?" "Well," said the Rector, "I don't think any of you have been idle. Friend Hamilton and I mean to have a turn up the meadows to see an old friend of ours; so we must leave you gentlemen to take care of the ladies. We shall join you at tea, and have a chat about the day's proceedings."

So there was a general dispersal of the company to the woods; Jane and Charles being left to their own devices till tea-time, when Freeman's cornet again gathered them. The kettle was boiled in the quarry, by means of a fire and cross-sticks, and a comfortable meal was provided: tea, and coffee, and et ceteras; and there was an unexpected appearance of strawberries and cream, about which Nelly

had enjoined secrecy. After tea—as the packing of the things would delay the dog-cart, which was left at an inn adjoining, and the boats also for their respective hampers—an hour's grace was given for a final ramble in the honeysuckle lanes. The sketch that Nelly made was a good one: a fern and foxglove bank, a bit of rock, some bushes, brambles, and a little rill; and her friend Clara—who could, however, sketch but little—made a praiseworthy, if feeble, attempt at the waterfall. When the lilies had been gathered, the swans fed, the fishing-tackle put up, and the crocks packed, and the ferns and flowers collected, the ladies were shawled and the boats unmoored; and as the birds sang out their evening song, Freeman started the cornet, and his boat led the way, with an exchange of passengers—Miss Emma Arundell being alongside him, while Annie Hamilton and Gilbert took the oars.

If the row down was pleasant, the row up was pleasanter, for they faced the glory of the western sky, and the stream was luminous; and as Burgess offered to pull with Nelly, her brother Frank was again able to sit by her friend Clara, who sang the song she promised, Freeman in the boat just ahead of them, accompanying her on the cornet, and also Annie Hamilton afterwards, who sang some songs; and the earnest conversation of Frank and Clara was frequently interrupted by the merry laughs of Nelly and the comments of her companion.

Sun-spots lay patched upon each grassy bank, a dazzling mist was mellowing the meadows, and yellow gleams were dropping through the leaves, and lighting up the rushes and the river. A golden glow was spreading through the sky, as rooks were wending homewards to the woods, and trees against it stood out bold and black. Deep

blue lay in the hollows of the hills, whose stately summits cut the sky with purple; and up their sides white fog was slowly creeping. The sun-spots passed, the bars of light died out; the water flushed into a rosy glow, which fading, vanished. A hush and stillness came, the birds were quiet; and as they reached the mill, the moon showed through the trees, the bats were skimming, and stars shone out upon the pale green sky.

The boating party finished their pleasant day with a merry supper, and a dance; and when at last they left together, the Rector's opinion that Frank Hamilton was "a very nice fellow," was—though she did not say as much—decidedly shared in by his daughter Clara.

"Well, good night, Nell," said her brother, as they parted on the stairs; "we have had a capital day, and I have enjoyed myself

immensely." "Yes, we have," said Nelly; "but I say Frank—here, come here, I want you—'a plainer girl would do to district visit!'" "I'll district visit you, you young puss," said Frank, as she shut to the door, and bolted it.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE STEEPLE-CHASE.—A SCRIMMAGE WITH THE GIPSIES.

AUGUST—the harvest month, the month for glorious weather, hot and steady; for glowing skies and flecks of silver clouds; for nice cool evenings and a red round moon, and pleasant rambles through upstanding corn. The pretty hamlet of Eymor was now getting autumnal, for its flowers were lessening, its ferns increasing, and its fruit was ripening; the foliage in the woods was fuller, and the tints on the commons were richer; the thistle-down was floating on the wastes,

the goldfinches were collecting, and the beeches were showing that the autumn was nigh. The grasshoppers were quieter and the cattle noisier, and Aaron had his traps about, for the moles were busy; the pewits were thick, and the ladycows were numerous; the hoers were at work in the turnips, and the harvest-mouse was nesting in the corn. The swifts were preparing to go, and the swallows were thinking of it, for the fox-glove bells were falling; the aftermath was bright in the pastures, and brighter for the cattle there; and there were light new leaves upon the elms and oaks. The apples were reddening in the orchards, and the nuts were ripening in the lanes; there was an autumn freshness in the mornings, and white fog veiled the meadows in the evenings.

And now that the month was drawing to a close, the harvest folks were looking to the finish. It was a good crop, high and

heavy; and it had so far been got in famously, for the sun had been hot enough to colour the men, and to tan the women, the lot of them; and Mary Moss, who was one amongst them, and as merry as ever, was "as brown as a little gipsy," as Jem the fisherman had told her, on his return from the Severn, where he had been spending some days at the lamperns, for they were "in" again. Mary was allowed by Moss to assist "at the master's" in the haymaking and the harvesting, as she liked it, and it was good for her; but he never would allow her to go into the hop-yard, as "strangers" were had for the picking, and so she might hear more than was good for her; Moss being as careful with her, in keeping her from all evil influences, as if she had been his own child, instead of merely an adopted daughter, as she had been for five years past, since the time he was left a widower.

As Jem the fisherman turned into the harvest-field, his chum Aaron was with him, and as usual the women had lots to say to them. It had been a capital season for the pair of them, for as the weather had been so fine, there had been plenty of pleasure people to the hills, and Aaron's wife and Mary had benefited accordingly. "A thinks you ood people han amaaide a goodish thing on it this atoime," said Jemima Davis. "What's the run bin on, Aaron?" "Oh, nothin much," said he, "'bout as usual an ornary, one thing an tother; though theer's bin a lot o' them theer fossilers an them planters—an unkimmon lot on 'em—a hammerin an a grubbin; thanks be ta God fur it, as it be the mane o' ma livin." "Is, thanks be due, Jem, as He suffers 'em ta come, an allows 'em ta be satisfoied. A thought though theest summut neow an suddint loike, as theer'd bin sa maany."

"Not pertikler, Jemima; not pertikler; though now yer 'ludes ta it, uz got a company o' hurchins, an uz gotten a hoak—a misletoe un; that bin frash loike, sartin-ly, an a works him wi' thun ash, a does, ta stonish 'em." "Whaatn ash?" "Whaatn?" said Aaron, "whoy, the shrew un, and the split un, both on 'em; they be curus, the par on 'em; an they helps thun apence. Youn sin 'em. But it's a soight," chuckled Aaron, "a soight ta see, that it be, whin a hopens ta them towners; dunna they star, loike two toms whin tha mates unbeknouin on the toiles."

"'Now this heer,' saays I, 'genlemen orl, bin a tree as yer dunna see ivery daay. It be a cleft ash; and though yer manna belave it, theers bin a choild through him! Theer be the mark on him. 'The mark o' the choild?' saays one. 'No,' saays I; 'the mark o' the clef, as be haled hup agin.'

'Thin it wanna a choild,' sis another. 'Is it wan,' saays I; 'a sin it mysen. It were Jaacob Paget's youngest, as oover-straained hisself a-jumpin; so we cleft thun ash wi' thun acker, an wedged him.' 'A see,' saays the saame un, 'jam'd the youth into it.' So a putten 'm roight o' that point," said Aaron, "an wint hon, athis awaays. 'Thin whin ud gotten 'm hopen'—'The choild?' saays the tother. 'No, thun ash,' saays I, —'the woife—that bin thun ooman belangin —putt the young un in a staate o' naature.' 'Stript him naaked?' saays he, an lafft. 'A did,' saays I, 'so ta saay it, an not be a mistatin on it, as wan ma manin, but ladies bein by, a wrapped it hup. Well, genlemen orl, thun ash wan hopen, an the lad wan theer'—'Naaked?' saays one. 'As a robin,' saays I, 'or two robins, ef it comes ta that; anythin ta accomerdate yer, an maake things pleasant; an Merrier—the naame they gid

hur at hur chrisnin—picks houd on 'm, an hur stans o' one soide the tree, an Jaacob, hur mon, o' the tother—oppersoite, as ma express it; an they pass-sed him backards an forrards through the tree—roight through him,' saays I, 'two toimes; twoice over as a ma saay; an thin, as thun ooman swaadled the lad, the mon swaathed thun ash, as the trick lay in doin on 'em both hup tagither. Well, genlemen orl,' saays I, 'putt yer 'ands hon it,' an they pass-ed theer 'ands oover it. 'It ba haled, baint it—cloused hup? An incoorse the choild ba haled too; but ef a hadna ha cloused close, ud a bin wakely ta this daay.'"

"An whaatn tha saay ta that, Aaron?" asked Mrs. Potts, who had been an attentive listener. "Oh, a saays a lots o' things,—'hony ta think,' 'an through a tree,' 'an the choild a livin!' an so on, saforth. A waaits fur thun applause in coorse, as be

proper, an no more than ma roight, fur the trouble, an the maakin on it hup, ta come hin well, so as ta soun true, as it bin true, as yer knows on; an thin, whin nobody dunna not saay not no moore, nor nothin, a goos on ta the nixt un, as be in the fild ajinin—that be the shrew un." "A knows," said 'Lina Morris. "An how dost tha know, Dolly?"—that being her usual designation, from her supposed use of that domestic implement. "Young Jack at Gilbert's," said she, "teld ma. Theer milkmaaid, Maary, alleys keeps some twigs on him by hur, ta strake the cows ooth, ef the shrewmouse laames 'em. Hur saays them mouses bin orful things a that, ef they runs oover 'em." "Is, they be," said Aaron; "youm gotten it roight, you han."

"What's that that's right, Aaron?" said Frank, as he came up to them. "Come, there's not much tying-up going on here: I

think it's more talk than work, isn't it? How are the lamperns, Jem?" "Purty well, sur; purty well; but it ba the fust week on 'em." "It ba the shrew, sur," said Aaron, answering the question put to him, "as laames the cows, an thun osses, an the ship, ba runnin across 'em when they be alyin down. But it ba a losin gaame fur 'em, it be, sur, as long as there be a shrew ash oothin asy distance, or I be handy. Yer see, sur, amaakes 'em, I do; this awaay. A bores thun ash wi' thun augur, an a gets a shrew, a loively un, sur; an a putts'm i' thun hole, an a praays oover'm—leastwaays a saays what a has ta saay, and Jem jines hin—dussant tha?" "Is a does," said Jem, "an a saays Aa-men! whin a finishes." "An thin," continued Aaron, "a plugs thun hole hup, an a maakes'm saafe, as a conna come hoot na moore, nivir; so a ba limited, ye see, sur, ta the run o' the tree; upsoide and downsoide, or roun and

roun, if it plase him; an thin thun ash be 'a shrew-ash' fur ivirmoar an Aa-men, ta the ind o' toime; an a sartin cure's i' the parish."

"Ah, I dare say," said Frank; "you are a knowing old gentleman, you are: so now that's settled, let's get on to work. Tie-up, tie-up, you women, or you won't be ready for the races. Two days more, and out come the horses; so look alive now, or you'll miss it. If you get it all stacked clean and well, my men, remember there will be a supper for the finish—we must wait for the carrying—and we will give you a good one, to freshen you up after your return from the races; so don't disappoint the other men, because they have done on their farms, and we have asked them too." "Send o' the Lord yer ma win, sur," said Jem; "send He ma suffer it, sur, as yer oughtn to; one o' the three at laste; an ool back the young missis's fur tuppence alang o' ony mon here. A wish hur wan agwain ta

roide'm hersen. Hur con handle'm, hur con."

The "races" alluded to was a friendly match between Saucy Boy, Firefly, and Yeoman on the one part, and Kitty, Prince, and Tally O on the other; the three last-named being ridden by their respective owners, Gilbert, Freeman, and Burgess; while Mr. Hamilton's three would be piloted by Frank, and Warrilow, and George Lawson, as Frank's cousin, Fred, was from home. The match originated in a discussion on the relative merits of the animals, and the race was fixed to come off on "the last day's stacking," so that the workpeople should have some fun, as well as a supper. The course was the difficulty—a ring round their own ground offering more obstacles than was advisable; but a spot near the Green Lanes was finally fixed upon —the Birch Farm—the tenant, Mr. John Marston, being a friend of Mr. Hamilton. Two races were arranged for, and the same

horses were to run in each. The first for fencing—a ring of four miles over a fair bit of hunting country, with seven flights of hurdles, and three water-jumps; the second for speed —one mile on the flat; the start to be at three for the first race, and at five for the second, some amusements between them; and the supper at the house was to be at seven, to the workpeople and their friends, in a tent by the rickyard.

The stacking in the field was finished on the morning of the race day, so all started in good time for "the course"—the men, the women, and the juveniles; the farmers and their friends; and Master Bob had a special holiday for the occasion to ride there with Nelly, and accompany Frank and his father. While they were saddling for the race, the keeper came up to Frank, and told him that as he was watching by the wood the night before, he overheard some of the gipsy fellows

who were on the prowl there, and with whom he had had a deal of trouble, announce their intention to make the master "lose the match" —particulars of which were known to everyone—for interfering with their poaching; and therefore as the Green Lanes, where the fellows were camped, had to be crossed in the race, it would be well, Moss thought, for the riders to be on their guard.

So Frank spoke to Warrilow and to Lawson; and Moss, Burton, Jem Webb, and Aaron, and Potts, and others, went off together, and posted themselves on the bank where they could see the best part of the run; and be at hand if they were wanted, when the horses crossed the lane, as there was a big drop into it, and a bushed bank out of it. On the hill at the starting place were a couple of booths and a marquee—in case of wet—and the women were there with "the company," and the lads were in the

trees. As three o'clock came, the six horses were in line, their riders — in lieu of the orthodox silk jackets—having a hoop each of broad ribbon round them.

"Go!" was given by the starter, and away they went; Prince leading well over the first three fields, when he had to give way to Kitty, who, taking off short at the second flight of hurdles, caught them with her foot, and Tally O passed her; Frank and Lawson and Warrilow, with their horses well in hand, following in the rear, until they had got over the first water jump, which was an awkward one. The pace then improved, and Yeoman, drawing away from the others, and doing his hurdles cleverly, took a clear lead of them, and distancing Prince and Kitty, landed second into the ploughed piece. Here, as his staying powers told, Tally O had to yield to him, and he took the lead and kept it to the rails, when over-jumping,

he staggered, fell, and rolled; Tally O getting well over them before Warrilow could mount again; Firefly and Saucy Boy creeping up steadily, and taking the brook—where Prince came down a burster — but a few lengths behind the others. The next half mile was a tester, for it was full of small enclosures, with big fences to them, that required to be taken carefully; and when the horses emerged once more into the open, it was seen plainly that the race—barring accidents—would lie between three of them—Saucy Boy, Tally O, and Firefly; and the latter, with Frank on him, was leading, Yeoman in the rear.

On they came, amidst the cheers of the crowd, straight and steadily; and topping the next fences almost abreast—rails, bush, and bank, and pleacher—they raced along the meadow for the lane. As they near the fence into it, Firefly is challenged, and stealing away from him, Tally O gets the

jump, disappears, and shows again, going well, in the piece opposite. Firefly goes next, and drops into the lane, followed by Saucy Boy; but the latter, as he is seen again, is riderless, and Firefly is not over! The others follow, take the leap, and cross, and as they race up the stubble together, Firefly, it is seen, is still absent, and Yeoman is pulled up—the fall has rigged him.

A row is heard, and those who are about there run, and they find when they get over into the lane, that a free fight is going on with the gipsies; Moss and company, and Frank and Lawson being in the thick of it. It is soon evident how matters stand, for there are cries of foul play, and Frank's horse is being held by Wainwright; so the people take sides and pitch in lustily; but the gipsies are tough fellows, and they can take their thumps like men. It is all in vain, however, for they are soon outnumbered;

and in the midst of exhortations to "Obed," "Asa," "Kish," and "Simeon," to "lay on!" the gipsies are forced back step by step, and driven to their tents; the people being then restrained by Frank from wreaking further vengeance.

As Moss picks up his battered hat, and dabs at an ugly cut on his forehead, Frank effaces, as well as he can, the result of the scrimmage on his own countenance, and then gallops off on Firefly to show himself. As he tops the first fence a cheer is heard—the race is ended! and Burton and the rest of them, who are at a spring mopping at their faces, answer it with another for their own victory; and they then set off for the booths, to find, when they get there, that the riderless Saucy Boy is declared the winner, he having taken all the fences and passed Tally O by a length, in the straight run in!

Frank objected, and wished Tally O to be

named; but Burgess said, "No; I am fairly beaten; the match was for horses, not for riders; Saucy Boy wins." Inquiries were made and questions answered. As Frank dropped into the lane a man threw his arms up, and Firefly swerved and fell; dislodged Frank, and bolted up the lane, where he was caught by Wainwright, and brought back again. Lawson followed, and was served the same trick as he came over; and he, too, was thrown, as the baulk made Saucy Boy cannon against the bank, which turned him over, when, leaving his rider in the ditch, he sprang up and galloped off; and with Tally O for a leader, he took the fences after him, and came in the winner, to the immense delight of Nelly; the appearance of Frank soon after, ending their fears as to Lawson.

The moment Frank was on his legs after Firefly fell, he dashed at the fellow and

knocked him over; and was knocked over by him in return, as Moss and the rest rushed to the rescue, followed by Lawson; who, hearing Frank's voice, picked himself up quickly and jumped into the lane, when he found the whole gang hard at it, three to one. The scale was, however, soon turned, as we have stated, but not before some ugly blows had been given and received. But as all the Eymor men were hardy dogs, who could take a thrashing "comfortably," the only difference that it made to them was a feeling of thankfulness that they were thereby enabled to crow over the rest, for the extra amusement the free fight afforded them. As Firefly had not done the distance at a pace, he was fresher than the others, so Frank scratched him; there were, therefore, at five o'clock four horses only at the post—Saucy Boy, Kitty, Tally O, and Prince; and after an exciting race, in which Tally O and

Saucy Boy were neck and neck, the former, admirably ridden by Burgess, was declared the winner, but by a head only.

The people then separated, and made the best of the way to Eymor House, where in due time feasting commenced, indoors and out; those in the tent doing full justice to that which was provided for them. The most jolly evening followed, for when old Jem—none the worse for the fight—produced his fiddle after supper, and joined Aaron's brother in "that" tune which had made the legs go so merrily in the mill meadow, all there knew, the women especially, that they were in for a good thing; and doubly good when Mr. Hamilton, "the meyster," came out and told them to "keep it up, for they should have a night of it;" and he and Mrs. Hamilton, Frank, Nelly, and the visitors, turned out afterwards as lookers on.

Mary Moss, who was there, left early, for having been out all the evening, she had her fowls to see to; and at eleven her father followed her, for the thumps had made his head ache; so he said he would just go up home and lie down for an hour, and then he would come down again; Burton, and Aaron, and Lawson having agreed to turn out and watch with him, in case the gipsies, thinking they were all safe, should come after the birds again. But the gipsies, to be quits with the keeper for the blows he had given them, had decided to "clear his roost" that night—they had been there before—and stealing up by Landimoor to see how the land lay, they heard Moss and the rest of them talking by the tent, so they went on to the wood.

Mary, who had been some time at home, was in the back kitchen, hunting about for the matches, as the wind had blown the lan-

tern out; when a cackling in the fowl-house made her hurry round the back, for she had left the door ajar, and she feared a fox was there. But before she could emerge from the shadow of the house, she heard some voices, and she saw a man, who went in through the door to the roost.

Now Mary, though she was but a little one, was a plucky one, and she was not going to lose her fowls if she could help it, not if there were twenty men there; so without a moment's hesitation, she rushed round the corner, reached the fowl-house, and jammed the door to, turned the key, and pocketed it, and away she went; and crying, "Turk, Turk, thieves! good dog!" ran to his kennel and loosed him. Turk was a big mastiff, who knew his business, so he came with her instantly. Patting the door, "They're in here," said she; "so wait and watch 'em;" and Turk bent down and sniffed beneath the door;

then reared up on his hind legs—he was a fine, lengthy dog—at the opening; a peep-hole, made on purpose to look in. There he remained, his tail upon the move, while she ran round and brought a leathern strap—the strap Moss used, for Turk could kill a man—and put it round his neck.

"I've got you safe, my boys," said she, "and got the dog; so don't attempt to stir, or else I'll loose him. He never lets go when he once gets hold. You'll take my fowls? No, thank you; not to-night. You'll wait till father comes, and then he'll settle you."

"Curse me," said some one, "but I know that voice! If she's still living, it's The Rawnee, Polly. Out o' the way, Jeiel, and let's have a look at her."

Turk, satisfied with his inspection, was down on his legs again, rubbing against his mistress, to let her know he perfectly understood the situation, and that he was not the

dog to leave her. The man, therefore, put his face to the opening, and stared at her. But to make his surmise a certainty, he called out to her by her gipsy name, to which she answered; and he then continued to talk to her in gipsy language; she replying to him in the same *patois*.

At length, "Stop the patter," said Mary, "I've done with it. I was in your power once, you are in mine now. Quits! Gipsy Jack—so there, it's no use talking." "We thought you dead!" "No fault of yours I wasn't; burnt, scorched to death! the night you fired the gorse. I saw my chance, and took it. The keeper found me—I've lived with him since then; he came on here—his wife was dead. He's been a father to me. I thank my God and him!"

"For old times, Mary, you will let us out?" "For old times, Reuben, I shall keep you in"—his name was Reuben Lee; his

nickname "Gipsy Jack"—"for those old times when you so beat me, Reub, because you could not make me what you wanted." "I'd have made you 'Gipsy Queen,' that's what I would. Why else should I, do you think, teach you to dance, and do the stilts; to read the palms, and patter to the people, when you were but a child, a chit? You forget all that!" "You did it for your profit. Forget? Yes; those dreadful races, and those hideous stalls; the smirks and smiles, and patter at the carriages, while—God knows it Reub—my little heart was breaking; yet you—you used to lash me in the tent, when people gave me sixpences, not shillings. You wretch!—stand back, or else I'll loose the dog."

"Don't be a fool—I'll tell you who you are, and all about you." "Tell on then!" "Unlock the door, and take that dog away, and you shall know your name. Your only

chance; we strike the tents at daylight. It's now or never." "Then never!" Mary said. "I would not trust you, Reub, no, not one inch, nor one of you; I know you all too well." "You were born a lady!" "And brought up a gipsy."

Finding that Mary was not to be coaxed over, Gipsy Jack and the three others who were there put their shoulders to the door, and tried to force it. "Be warned in time," said she. "If that door gives one inch, I'll slip the dog." "Well, hear me, then. Don't trap an old pal, Polly. Come, let us out. Your name is——" "Caught!" was her cry, "for here," said she, "is father."

"There's Gipsy Jack in there, the man who beat me. I've locked him in." "Then his time's come," said Moss, "for I'll beat him. Where is the key?" "I have it in my pocket. But wait a bit, for there are others there—three gipsies with him. Run

back now, father, and bring some one with you, and then you'll take the lot." "You won't then be afraid, for twenty minutes, as Turk is here?" "You know me better, father. No, be quick." So Moss ran off for help, and Reub cursed Mary for a stupid wretch. "Now find it out," said he; "you've missed your chance. You might be in your carriage—stay, and foot it!" "I've said my say," said she; "you will not alter me. Come, Turk, we'll sit down yonder, and we'll watch this door. Talk to the wind, Reub Lee;" and Mary went the other side the plot, and sat down on a bench. She would have no more of it.

After she had continued to sit there for some time, holding on to Turk with difficulty—for he could hear them inside there, and kept striving to get at them—Moss, Aaron, Lawson, and Burton came up; and placing Mary with the dog at the door,

Moss went round with the rest to the back, to take the fellows in flank; as he could get into the roost through a door in the shed, where he kept his traps.

The door was open, and the gipsies gone!

CHAPTER IX.

"THE VERY MAN!—THE MAN I WANT," SAID LAWSON.

THREE weeks had elapsed since the steeple-chase, and the events connected with it; and autumn tints were spreading through the woods, and birds were making autumn music there. The harvest was finished, the leasing was over, and the beans were stacked, for they ripened early; the colts were weaned, and the ricks were thatched, and the steep was ready, for the ploughing was forward for winter wheat.

The meadows were bright, and brighter for the saffron, but tree-greens were paling; and the beech, and the birch, and the limes were yellowing visibly. The apples were dropping in the orchards, the blackberries and the nuts were ripening in the lanes, and early risers were busy amongst the mushrooms. Gossamer was on the hedges, hawthorn berries were showing, and the ivy was in blossom. The swifts had left, and the martens were departing, and the swallows had taken to roost in trees; the pewits were in flocks, and the goldfinches were collecting; the summer flowers were going, and winter birds were coming. Partridges were falling in the stubbles, and the time of the pheasants was short, and there was a great gunning in the fields, and a constant chatter in the hop-yards; for the pickers were on, and had almost finished, and Jem, the fisherman, was one amongst them; for he had done with

the trout till the next May-day, and had no longer the chance of a salmon.

It had been a lucky picking with the lot of them, for the grand day for the woods —the fourteenth of September, the day of "Holy Rood"—had fallen this year on a Sunday; so all were able to go "a nutting" to Hazel Hollow, "to choose a sweetheart and to gather nuts;" such was the custom.

Jem and Aaron, who had five pigs "between them," had already, by permission, turned them into the woods, for acorns, that there were dropping daily from the trees—"ac-orns," as Aaron, with a full Saxon flavour, designated them. Mary's chickens were busy at the beech-mast, and Mrs. Davis had seen to her bee-hives, and had straightened the holes in them, to do the wasps out of the honey; and worthy Tom Norton, who had got over his refusal, had been up to The Poplars, to bargain with Mrs. Pap-

worth, for the "primest goose" she had, for the twenty-ninth, as he always "kept" Michaelmas; and Jones, the drier, was now getting wilder, because those in the hop-yard would persist in "keepin on" sending more hops for the kiln than he could well manage, as they were large and fine; for, thanks to the flood, the crop was heavy, as Mr. Hamilton told Minchem it would be; "for what happens, James, is always for the best."

They had commenced hop-picking on the first — the previous Monday fortnight — as they found, if they delayed a few days for "the birds," those hops last to ripen, would be too ripe when they got to them; besides which, if they did not make a finish of them by the end of the third week or so, they would probably get in for the storms; when, should the hops be battered by wind or wet, the sample would be "foxy," and the price

but low; and this time, as they were so unusually fine, they were well worth looking after. Frank and his father had therefore to be content with a blaze at the birds on the morning, and with occasional shots as they could; for they had eighty pickers at work—ten cribs of them—two-and-twenty neighbours, and eight-and-fifty "strangers;" and as the strangers were the usual lot from the "Black Country," it needed the presence of both Frank and his father to keep them in order.

The work was well enough, as they picked "by the bushel," and they had to pick "clean;" but as the majority of the strangers were girls—saucy impudent sluts, who took a good deal of talking to, when both were away—Frank and his father—the place was at once in an uproar, for they were a wild lot. It is only a pity that cottage hands should be so insufficient, in that most picturesque

scene of all in farm belongings—more picturesque even than the vines in France; for such a pretty scene should have a less rough element in its pretty grouping. However, it is the only chance the whole year round such people have of exchanging their black and smoky, grimy dwelling-places, for pure air and open country; and seeing blue, green, and white, in sky, and wood, and water; for the sky with them is black, the trees are leafless, and all the water yellow; we must not therefore grudge their only "out." Those who live wholly in the country, have far more to be thankful for than they imagine.

Most of the hops were picked, and a few days more would finish them, so Frank had more work than ever to keep the girls out of the orchards; for though apples, to string round their necks, and to take with them, were always given them when they left, as they were not accustomed to see heaps of rosy

ones hanging within their reach, anywhere and everywhere, the temptation to take was always too strong for them, so they had to be looked after.

"What are they on for in the kiln?" said Strafford—a town friend of Frank's, who was over there, and who heard them unusually noisy—as he and Frank came back from a look round the orchards, and sat down for a smoke in the saddle-room. "The usual lot of it," was the reply, "I suppose; but by the sound of them—singing, and noising, and jigging—they have got some cider about too." "Let us go and have a look at them; I should like to see what they are up to." "Oh, bother going; they're a common lot—must be, in fact, from sheer necessity. They are pit-bank people. Stay here and smoke." "Well, we can do a pipe all in one, if we do go; I should like to hear," said Strafford, "just what they are singing; for the mere fun of

the thing, you know, and out of curiosity, because there are a lot of your own folks with them. Those who write on country matters too, get so awfully gushing, and put such very proper language, and such patriotic songs, and such wonderful sentiments into the mouths of their rustics on all possible occasions—Harvests, Feasts, and Festivals—that I really should like to see for once, old fellow, if what they say be true."

"True?" said Frank, "not a bit of it—about as true as the bare feet of the gleaning girls, that you see in pictures; when the fact is, were they silly enough to drop their highlows, as there represented, the stubble would cut their toes off. It is all put in for the sake of 'the picturesque'—false but interesting; for highflown speeches and humble folks don't go together. However, if you like to come," said Frank, "come on. We can stay outside and see them through

the window; it will be too hot within, for all the fires are on." "It will at least give one," said Strafford, "'a genuine bit' of pickers after work, inside the kiln. I never saw them." "Yes, that's right enough, but don't expect the virtuous heroine or the heavy father. The folks are as good as their surroundings, and if their speech be rough, their tongues are civil; but as to sentiment —nonsense; you must take them as you find them."

"What girl is that who is making such a mouthful of it?" said Strafford, as they reached the kiln, where one was singing. "That? one of the strangers, to be sure," said Frank, "can't you hear the O's—the Dudley O's? There you are again, as large as cart wheels!"—

"Then said he, dear E-eloiza thee must be moi broide,
So we marri-ed and we liv-ed at Doodlee Oode soide."

The song, whatever it was, seemed to amuse

the lot of them, as a great clapping of hands followed it.

The scene, as Strafford saw it through the window, was a strange one. There were five fires on—five glowing mouths—with red flakes dropping through the grating under. Around, and perched on bricks, blocks, chumps, and benches, were women, girls, and men; the former bonnetless, their dresses loose; the latter with waistcoats open, and shirtsleeves the rule, their shadows thrown high up, fantastically. Their features were a study—one side aglow, the other lost in shade, except those in the front, where all were just like polished warming-pans or bright brass kettles. Old Joe was, of course, amongst them, and his Roman nose, as he sat on the side, came out splendidly. So did Jem's dents in his crab countenance, and Aaron's wrinkles; and as for young Tom's round O of a mouth, when he opened

it wide, it was like the crater of a small volcano. There were forty or fifty people in there—stewing! and only Gustave Doré could have done justice to them, for the lights were weird and shifting, and the glow was mighty!

The one who had finished her song then said her say, and called on the fisherman "for a funny one;" but Jem did not know a funny one: however, he said, as the apples were ripe, and they had got drink to-night, he would sing them one on cy-der, "ef so be as a con 'emember it." It was a taking topic with them, and the very mention of it led to the moving of the cans about, and the handling of cups and basins—the latter predominating—the basins in which they had their "pap" in the morning and their broth at night; for, as Mrs. Warmington had been too busy to see to their broth, she had sent them bread and cheese and cider

—a welcome substitute. Now one peculiarity of Jem's songs was this—that from habit, he always accompanied them with an imaginary fiddle; so that what with manœuvring with his fingers, putting his head on one side—like a magpie looking into a bone—and tapping with his foot, it was some time before he had got the right points for his eyes, and was in working order; but then he "went it." The words only can be given, the "megrums" he made must be imagined. This was the song:—

"O, Ise the one fur the country, boys,
As it be theer yer gits good cy-der;
Fur ooth ma wittles as I injiys,
It tases noice, does cy-der.
Cy-der, cy-der, Ise petikler fond o' ma cy-der.

For aay, an corn, fild-work, an hops,
Yer conna bate good cy-der;
It spurts yer hup loike when yer stops—
An Ise partial too ta cy-der.
Cy-der, cy-der, O Ise powerful fond o' ma cy-der.

But abaint o' the touns as ud spen ma brouns—
  Theer's be turmuts mashed, not 'cy-der !'
That taaste baint moine; no aloikes it proime,
  Raal apple-juice—that's 'cy-der.'
    Cy-der, cy-der, fur Ise oonderful fond o' ma
      cy-der.

Sa bless the blossom, an bless the shoot
  As comes to maake the cy-der;
And sen' we han a hape o' fruit,
  Whoy we shanna waant fur cy-der.
      Tha Lord be praaised fur
    Cy-der, cy-der, Ise oonaccountable fond o' ma
      cy-der."

As a cheer rose, the head was lifted from the imaginary fiddle, the fingers ceased to work, and the foot was still; and in response to the usual inquiry as to what they should "saay" after it, Jem, as a preliminary, said, "Pass the can, Joe;" and having filled his horn—which he always carried in his pocket—he shot one eye to the ceiling and the other to the floor, and thus delivered himself—"Maates

all, a looks towards yer"—which he didn't—"an maay ivery orchid hang heavy, boys;" and taking a big drink he passed on the can to the next.

After it had been the round of them—a work of time, as cups were few and mouths were many, and basins "wanna loiked"—and each one had muttered "orchids heavy," as their own abbreviation of the toast before wetting their lips, "Now then, Joe," said the fisherman, "it bin your turn, oud mon, a calls o' thee; an gie us a good un, ecos yer con do it, yer con." So Joe, after a few bashful denials as to his capabilities, passed his hands through his white hair, blew his nose stoutly and decisively, as though once for all, and then, looking round at the company, he relaxed his muscles, took a pull at his pipe, and thus commenced—his pause at the end of each verse, followed by the announcement that it

was "a longful toime agoo" being most amusing.

"O, 'twere whin a were a youngster the press-gang comed our waay,
And cotched ma in a twinkle-in, an sint ma hoff ta say,
All in that faamous wessel as were called 'The Billeroo'—
But p'raps yer hanna heerd o' it—'twere a longful toime agoo.
A longful toime agoo, a longful toime agoo;
Is, that ma merry, merry boys, were a longful toime agoo.

The cappen he saays 'Now, young mon, youn ha' ta swab the deck,
So moind yer precious legs, don't brake yer still more precious neck;
Fur pitch an toss be whaat the waaves does wi' 'The Billeroo;'
An there's sharks about, so jist look out—'twere a longful toime agoo.
A longful toime agoo, a longful toime agoo;
Is, that ma merry, merry boys, were a longful toime agoo.

A hádna spoked it scaarce a nour, whin as on the
soide a lent,
Roight ooverboard hinto the say a werry quick-ly
went;
An a shark as were a swimmin theer, about 'The
Billeroo,'
Jist gin a chop, and a had ma, pop—'twere a longful
time agoo.
A longful toime agoo, a longful toime agoo;
Is, that ma merry, merry boys, were a longful toime
agoo.

Insoide that shark it all were dark, an so a got ma
knoife,
An cut awaay a good un, boys, ta troy ta saave ma
loife;
An soon a crapt out through his ribs, and hup 'The
Billeroo;'
Sa sold the shark, it were a lark—'twere a longful
toime agoo.
A longful toime agoo, a longful toime agoo;
Is, that ma merry, merry boys, were a longful toime
agoo."

"That ool do, Joe, that ool," said a Brierly Hill girl—Matilda Towsler—"trust thee for

a good un. What shoon we say arter it, old mon?" "Well," replied Joe, as he lit his pipe afresh, and took a draw or two as he said it, "'Fro' sharks at say, an sharks o' shore,'—them's lawyers, lads—'Good Lord deliver us!'"

"A good toast, old man," said Reuben Radcliffe, the ganger, "take thy sup and pass it—pass it on to we." "Now, Susanna," said Joe to Miss Mason—a pit-bank girl—"it bin me ta call, and a calls o' thee. Bost thee hoff lass, an gie us summut lovin." So, as Susanna was a young woman who was not troubled with shyness, and who was only too glad of the chance to display her vocal powers, she took her handkerchief from her pocket at once, mopped her face with it, put the two corners together, and placed it on her knee; and then, holding her basin in her lap with both hands, called forth a pleasing expression, and treated the

company to a ditty; prefacing it with, "Now then, 'Misletoe Bough,' girls, for tune, and all in for chorus."

But as Susanna's song was of inordinate length—nine verses—space prevents us from doing justice to it; suffice it therefore to say that it was about the goings on of two servant girls, and that love, jealousy, and revenge, constituted the pith of it; and that the perfidy of the lover was amply provided for, as justice demanded, in an impressive last verse. "Well done, Susanna!" said Joe, as the song ended, and she wiped her mouth, and put her handkerchief in her pocket. "Whatn yer saay arter that?" "Say?" said Susanna, handing her basin to him for the "drap o' cy-der"—"'Happy hearts, and merry faces; plenty o' chaps, and the best o' places.'" "Now Jenny," said Susanna, "I call on thee." But Miss Jenny Jessifer had a cold, audibly and decidedly so, therefore she was

excused; little Polly Prettyman kindly offering to sing for her, "and a tidy one too;" which showed that Miss P. had some thought about her, and could be well behaved when she chose to.

But the song, though perfectly right and proper, was open to the same objection of lengthiness as Susanna's; but as it related solely and wholly to the practice of "cribbing" in the hop-yards, and the emoluments to be derived from the cribbed by the cribbers—a victimisation of town-friends which farmers now discourage—the inability to devote space to it will not matter. "Well done, Polly, girl," said "Miss" Jessifer—so called, as she had a cup of her own for cider evenings—"give us something to say after it." "Well," said Polly, "maybe we can't say better than 'May them as be cribbed, pay up!'" "Good," said Reuben, "give her the cy-der, Joe;" and the young bright-

eyes raised her friend's cup to her lips, and said, "Friends all."

"Here's the one I shall call on," said she as the mole-man entered; but Aaron pleading that he "wan welly droy," got hold of Jem's horn and stuck to it; and as the dryness threatened to take some time to eradicate, Charles Davis, who had come in with him, offered himself as a substitute, and was at once accepted; for Charles was smart-looking and a favourite, and Selina had to keep a sharp look-out in the picking. But just as Charles had pulled his cap down tightly, straightened his waistcoat, and had dug an imaginary spur into the leg of his stool, as his preliminary for a fair start, Moss the keeper came up the pitching with Lawson, and said to Frank, "Can I have a word with you, sir?" "What is it, Moss?" said he, as he left Strafford and went to him. "Those Green Lane gentle-

men mean to have some of your birds to-night, sir. I have just had the office of it. There will be seven or eight of 'em, sir, so I thought I'd just get Burton, and George here—and p'r'aps Charles, if you like, sir—to come along, and see if we can't take the lot of 'em." "Seven or eight, eh?" said Frank. "Well, Moss, I think I can tackle two of them, and I am sure you can, and George also; so as there will no doubt be a bolter or two amongst them, never mind Charles, or Burton, we shall manage them. What time?" Say twelve, sir, at latest, as we ought to be crouched by then." "All right," said Frank. "My friend there will be off presently, and then I'll go up to the house; get my coat, and my bit of ash" —"Your fighting-stick, sir," put in Moss— "and be at your place by eleven." So at the time fixed Frank was at the keeper's, Strafford having left after he had heard a

capital hunting song by Charles and some more by the company.

"Now," said Moss, as they reached a stubble-field by the wood, "here we are, sir; and we must be quick about it." A signal being agreed on, and the action of each arranged, Frank and Lawson then placed themselves under the hedgerow; first stamping down the briars, and pitching aside the broken bits of stick, that there should be no crackling; Moss doing the same where he was. Each one then stocked a hump of turf from the bank, placed it at the edge of the ditch, and lay down. With his head thus level with the stubble, but hidden by the sod, no one could come into the field without being visible against the sky to each of them, as the field sloped up. "Down!" said Moss; "they're here;" and as the whisper came, they heard the call of the cock bird—or, at least, a good imitation of

it; and at the same time the dark figures of the poachers, looking tall against the sky, were seen at the top of the field, coming straight down the stubble; and then they stopped, stooped down, and rose again; while the three watchers lay close, each with his chin on the ground.

As the men separated, the call was repeated a time or two, and then a swoop was heard, and a covey dropped. The calls continued, and more birds came over, from either side. At length, after waiting some time, which seemed to Frank an age, he heard the footsteps crunching down the stubble, and with them, a gently sweeping sound—a drag-net, plainly; and two men with it, one on either side, and others after them—seven altogether. The nearest man came on, and passed by Frank, and then stood still, with the cord in his hand by which the net was dragged. A flutter was

heard, and the hoot of an owl was given, when the birds lay still, and the net was dropped; and he and the one opposite him, then began to walk over it; the other men at the same time coming down to meet them, they also walking on the net, which was weighted at their end to keep it down.

The flutter increased, and the men dropped down to grasp the birds, when "Up and into them!" shouts out the keeper; and almost before the fellows could jump up, Frank, and Moss, and Lawson sprang from the ditch, and were in the midst of them. Blows followed, and first one was down and then another, when a cry of "I've got him" from Lawson, and the capture simultaneously of a man each by Moss and Frank, incited the poachers to renewed vigour; and bringing a shower of blows to bear on them, they released their companions, who then, with the other gipsy fellows, ran for the wood.

But as Moss and Frank reached the hedge in pursuit, "Come here," says Lawson; "the one I've got's a tough un;" so they turned, and found them struggling in the ditch, the fellow uppermost. Moss got a grip, and jumped him to his feet, and then Frank held him; and as he did so, from off the poacher's face down dropped a beard. "The very man! —the man I want," said Lawson. "Lewis! by all that's lucky. That, then, for Jessie." A thud, a stagger, and then down he went, with Lawson on to him. "I have you now, you villain! Where's my sister?" But all that Lewis said was, "Take him off; I'm choking!" for George's hand had got him by the throat.

"Come, George," said Frank, "I can't have this, you know; you'll kill the fellow: he's gasping. Come off him;" and up Frank dragged him. "Moss, see to this man, and take him up the field, and wait for me."

"Now look here, George," said Frank, as Moss took Lewis, "this man belongs to me; he's on our ground. If there's a row, you'll have to leave the farm. Why force a talk? why can't you let it rest? You have no proof." "But he's the cause; I'd kill him if I dare." "And hang yourself. Go home and sleep on it. Leave all to me, and come up in the morning; say, at twelve. Now go, George, go; or there'll be mischief done." So Lawson sulkily turned off for home, and Frank went back to Moss.

"Sit down," said Frank; and Lewis, held by Moss, sat down beside him. "Moss, wait up yonder."

"That man," said Frank, as Moss left, "is our keeper. What I've to say I don't want him to hear. George Lawson's sister's dead; he says, through you; she drowned herself." "When?" Lewis asked. "On New Year's eve; we found her handkerchief down

by the water." "It's wrong, sir, that is. Three months ago I saw her on Barnes Common." "You did?" "And kissed her. She was with her fancy-man; he'd just gone from her." "You'll swear that, on your oath?" "I will," said Lewis. "Where is she now?" "Oh, that I cannot say. She then lived out at Brixton. I called upon her; but he had got aware of me, and had walked her off. They went to Folkestone." "Is that the truth? Here, look up at that star!" "It is, so help me Heaven!" "And when, before that time, did you last see her?" "Four years before. I followed her to Liverpool. She sailed for New York with a gentleman, in one week after. I found it out, and went down to the docks, and saw her with him, standing on the deck. I watched the ship till she was out of sight; no boat came from her." "What name?" "The Celtic; the White Star Line. 'Twas

on a Thursday, at the end of May." "And when, before that?" "Four years again. She lived at Chelsea then; I saw her often." "All this you swear?" "I do, most solemnly." "How long have you been here?" "Five days. We struck the camp on Sunday; eight miles or so from here, by Harford Common." "Then look here, Lewis; I shall let you go; but be advised, and leave the neighbourhood, and try to get in better company." "I'm much obliged to you; I will," said Lewis.

"Moss," said Frank, when he joined him, "I've let him off. It's no use having a bother in the parish." "All right, sir," said the keeper. "As Lawson is so bitter, p'r'aps it's best. So, now, we'll free the birds, sir, please, and get the net." It was a silk one; forty yards long and five-and-twenty wide, and he gave it to Frank, who folded it up and put it safely in his jacket pocket.

"Moss," said Frank, "keep quiet, will you, over this lot? It will do no good to talk of it." "You're right, sir. There'll no one know from me," was his reply.

At twelve the next morning, George called. "He's gone," said Frank. "Then I'll take him myself," said Lawson; and running home, he jumped on his horse, turned his head for the Green Lanes, and galloped his hardest. But the tents were struck, and the gipsies gone! "Next time shall settle it," was Lawson's comment.

CHAPTER X.

OUT WITH THE HARRIERS.—A LUCKY FALL.

When Moss entered the roost with his party, and found the men had fled—they had forced the door and torn down some boards—the fowls were safe; so he thought that it was of no use his taking action in the matter; as not having seen the men himself, he could not swear to them, if charged for breaking in. But he told Mary when they went into the house, that if she would come with him to the camp the next day, and point out Gipsy Jack, he would "pitch into him, law or no law," for his former treat-

ment of her, when she lived with the tribe —the Lees, the Locks, and the Etheridges, three gipsy clans. Mary, however, did not care to do so, because she feared her father would get hurt; and as Moss could not get any reliable description of him from her—as she had not seen him but through the slit in the door, for five years—he decided to work it out himself. But Gipsy Jack, for once, had told the truth; for when Moss, unknown to Mary, went the next morning to the Green Lanes, there were no tents there—nothing but chips and ashes; neither were there the usual bits and scraps on the bushes, placed here and there, as if lodged by the wind, to tell their route; for he searched most carefully each side the lane, and also up the road—no sign or trace. They had trod the tracks out, as they went that morning, by following the vans.

When Mary came to think things over,

she was sorry she had not parleyed with the fellow, as he might have told her something, but she both doubted and feared him; and had she loosed him out, Turk might have killed him, or have made a dash at the lot of them; and she did not fancy shutting up the dog, and trusting herself to them. She was, however, so happy and comfortable in her own home, that in a short time, she thought no more about it; and she did not tell her father what "Jack" said.

Lawson, however, could not get over his little matter so easily, and he remained sullen and dogged for a week or two, as, though he was a very good fellow in many respects, temper was his failing—he had the old man's blood in him—and he was hot and unforgiving, like his sister. But as he was often with Frank and his father when they went shooting—for now that the hop-picking was over they made up for lost time—he had to come out of it,

for it was necessary for him to be both civil and obliging; though his intention to "settle it" with Lewis, the next time he met him, remained unchanged. As things turned out, it would have been better had it been otherwise. Frank kept to himself that which Lewis told him; for he thought it was better that Lawson should continue to believe in his sister's death, than that he should be told the truth about her.

The hops were now sold, as the price offered for them was too good to hold over; the men were in the fields, the bird-tenders were busy, and the women were after the wind-falls, prior to shaking the trees for the heap, and hand-picking the early pot-fruit; and general out-door work was being pushed forward rapidly while days were dry. October had come in well, and the glory of its tints was getting each day more perceptible, for the middle of the month was past. The walnut-trees were

leafless, and the rooks were home at six; the robins were on the chirp again, and cottage hives were yielding up their honey. Frank was busy amongst the pheasants, and he had shot a snipe; and the timber-haulers—who had but a fortnight left for the finish—were hard on in the dingles, to get the sticks cleared away by the time. The turnips were hurdled off for the sheep, and the beans were carried, for it had been fine and dry; and there were moving teams, with men and boys beside them. Aaron's earth-stopping occupation had returned, and Jem, the fisherman, was at the river daily, for he remembered that he should have done with the eels by the end of the month, and must then—"for the meyster's sake"—keep a good look out for the wild ducks; and he already knew of an old mallard and a lot of flappers in the sedges. Jem was very cute on ducks, and therefore useful, as Frank liked duck-shooting; and he

was a rare hand at marking them as they went or returned to their feeding-grounds; and even after they had been shot at, for though their route then would be changed each day, Jem was always down to them; and Frank knew, if he could only turn out soon enough to be gun in hand by daybreak, or be just after sunset, out with Jem, that the noise of their wings was certain, and a shot safe.

The mole-man, Aaron, was in a great state of satisfaction, for in the Home Wood and the fox-cover, there were three litters, and a fourth in the dingle by Landimoor; and the cubs were strong and active, and promised good sport, now that "the good time" had come again—best time of all—the hunting season. Frank and his father, and Nelly too, had thrice been out cub-hunting; twice at home, and once at Bickley—for as Mr. Hamilton and his brother John were staunch preservers, and had always a litter or two,

the Ledbury and the Hereford came and rattled them, as often as the rest of their country allowed them to. The season promised well, and old Joe and Charles were now pretty constantly in the stables, and Nelly too; for about this time she had a great deal to say to Saucy Boy, who was fast getting into good hard condition, and "fit" for the regular business that was now commencing; and as she gave him a good gallop daily for exercise, Whiteface had an easy time of it. Young Tom's time was also taken up a good deal—that is at night—with the magpie, as his time had come for a change of phrase; the orthodox ejaculations of Peterkin to his master and Frank, from October to April, being comprised in the following chatter: "Got the brush! Tally O." "Had a purl—Down again!" and which he knew when to loose off by the sight of the scarlet coats. The hop-pickers had, how-

ever, so demoralised the bird in the three weeks they had at him, that it was some time before he could be got to confine himself to sporting phrases; he being sadly disposed to mix up hunting terms with Dudley lingo, and to supplement the remarks laid down for him, by a large assortment of profane words common to that district. "Those who are threatened live long;" and to that must be attributed the continued life of Peter, whose great dislike to "Flood"—now grown to sheephood—had never lessened. There was one good point, however, about Peter, he had got to stammer, through his rapid maledictions on the pickers, who teased him daily; it was now possible, therefore, to get into the house and shut the door before he had time to get to the worst of it, Peterkin's perorations being invariably of a condemnatory character.

A good deal of Nelly's time being now occupied in the saddle—more than it need

have been had she been less fond of jumping, the painting for awhile was set aside, as, with her usual journeyings about the parish, and her work at home, as the days were shorter, she had not much light. The season, too, had brought her occupation—the gathering of leaves, which she was fond of; a frequent selection and arrangement of them for the rooms, in place of flowers, being at this time of the year one of Nelly's hobbies; and as she had a decided eye for colour, she always made them into pretty groupings; for she got scarlet, and purple, and gold, with the cherry, the medlar, and poplar; and deep bronze, and rich russet and orange, with the beech, and the oak, and the lime; and the Virginia creeper which was against the house, and was now fast shedding, gave her some crimson large leaves for deep colour.

But Nelly's greatest glories in the leaf-line were from the hedges—the bramble leaves,

which, upturned, were grey-green, and pendent, mottled, with orange, crimson, purply-brown, and black; no two alike, and each one beautiful—Nature's own palette for her autumn foreground. These—with others added, for umbers and olive-greens, and browns and greys—made, with a fringe of ferns, and here and there some grasses, a charming bit of colour for the table. Nelly also turned to account these autumn tints, as her paint-box showed; for there lay dead leaves, kept for the pleasant studies of harmony and contrast. She used to say, "Each autumn hedgerow was a mine of colour—a book to artists."

There were few things she loved better, on a nice fresh autumn morning, than to stand on the lawn and watch the woods; for all shades were there, from birch to yew, from hazel boughs to oak, as the sunlight or shadow travelled slowly down them; now bringing into view some glowing tint, then,

with full sunshine, lighting all the colours; or, for a moment, dulling all to grey, while purply shadows lay in every hollow. Throughout the year is beauty—for eyes that see it—but most beautiful of all is brown October, the month of months for any woodland country; and then it is that the long-stretching woods of the Teme valley, that hang upon the hills and touch the river, have, in their glory of colour, their greatest attraction.

To Harry Anderson, they were specially attractive at this season, for they were vast and billowy; and the time was now at hand for his autumn visit to Eymor, which he hoped to make one of some duration; as it would have to include not only the usual sketching in those grand old woods, but also, at Frank's special invitation, a fair share of hunting and shooting; for Harry, though a town resident, was fond of both, and he had

a good horse and some dogs of his own. A letter from Frank hastened him, for there was a morning's cubbing handy, and a meet of the harriers at Bickley, so he came from town in time for them.

Frank mounted him on the cover hack for the cubbing, and on the golden-bay for the harriers; he himself riding Firefly, and Nelly Saucy Boy; and they went up to her uncle's together, in time for the breakfast. It was a large meet, for "Hamilton, of Bickley" was a man well-liked, and he always showed them sport, as hares with him were plentiful. The pack was a good one, and consisted of fifteen couples of blue mottles, twenty inches high, even and well-built. The meet was at twelve, and the horn, in the absence of the master, was taken by Captain Villars.

"Now, Captain," said Mr. Hamilton, after the good things had been done justice to, "if you are ready, we'll start"—he rode the

cob, and Fred was on the pony. The throw off was in some turnips, not far from the farm-buildings, and there was a good field out. Before the hounds had been ten minutes in, the slot was hit by Barmaid, and she and Matchless and Melody, went away with it musically, followed by the pack; the hare making straight for the hills, like an old Jack. Some very pretty fencing followed, and the hounds carried it to the plantations, where a fast ring ensued; when several hares getting up, the hounds were whipped off, and they were then taken to the lower grounds, where a fresh hare was viewed away directly; and the pack being put upon her line, they had a capital burst up the meadows, and checked at the road.

Bellman, however—a famous road-hunter—put her up in the ditch; and for three fields, in spite of turns and twists, they ran in view, and then they checked again in a by-lane, as

sheep were lying there. But Cautious and Crafty feathering along the road, broke fence and went away, and the pack with them full cry, right across country up to Brampton Spinny, and thence to Bromyard Down; when, after racing her across a couple of fields, they pulled her down in the open; and Nelly, who had gone well all through, was in at the finish, and she had the scut from the Captain.

They then moved back to the meadows, and the hounds worked up to a form; but after a smart run of twenty minutes, the hare went to vault. But they found another in a sedgy flat, and pace and music followed, for the sky had clouded, so the scent was better; and for half an hour or more the hounds and horses too raced on their hardest, over a good country, up to Linley village, where she squatted, and they checked. She had thrown up in a rickyard, but as the Captain came to their assistance, she was soon forced; and

after running a short ring, she took again to the open, and gave them another capital burst, the hounds going with their noses down, and holding steadily to the line in good hunting form, right to the river, which she took at once, and swam it gamely, followed by the pack; Fretful, the leading hound, being close to her scut. But all the fresher for her bath, she got the lead on landing, and went at a rattling pace up the meadows; thus widening at every stride, her distance from the horsemen, who, having to go round by the bridge, which was a long way up, got thrown out most effectually; and when at last they reached the hounds, the hare was killed and eaten; and Frank was with them, as he swam the river, and he was the only man to have it.

Trotting off again in the direction of Bickley—for they were then eight miles from it—the Captain tried a little patch of gorse, and a hare was viewed away; but it was a

short runner; so she kept ringing round her old quarters, doubling back constantly, and squatting suddenly. But at last, getting a view, the hounds laid themselves out for best pace, and racing her into a ploughed field, they made a dash, and ran into her. The Captain then, as it was getting late, whipped off.

In the first run, the Eymor people were together; but in the second one, when they had all to pelt for the bridge through lanes and fields, to escape the many lines of stiff rails by the river, Frank put Firefly at the water, and he was the only man who got over. So Harry and Nelly were left alone; and as they saw trying to reach the hounds was hopeless, and that unless the hare doubled back, they should see no more of it, they decided to jog on quietly for home; though as neither knew the way, and guides were scarce, they had to get on as they

could. But they were in no hurry, for it was a lovely afternoon, and the little rain that had fallen had made it all the fresher; and as they had not seen each other for some time—not since they had parted in June—they had each a great deal to talk about, and there was no knowing when a like chance for a good gossip may again occur.

The road was new to each of them, but they got along pretty well, however, until they came to a long green lane, which being nearly all turf, the temptation for a good gallop was too strong to be resisted, so away they went at best pace. But when they got to the end of it, they found that it was a blind road; the way on, over the fields—if ever such a way existed—being now stopped.

To have turned back would have taken them some time, and as the spin along the

turf had warmed their horses, and got their mettle up, Nelly proposed, as there was nobody in sight, that they should take the fences, and do a bit of country, until they found a road. So over the hedge went Anderson, into a stubble, and Nelly followed him; and then into some plough, when skirting round the adland, they dropped into a grass piece where were rails, which Nelly jumped; but just as Anderson was coming at them, his horse slipped up and fell, and shot him over—a very heavy fall, for there he lay, the breath knocked out of him.

Nelly was up with him in a moment, and jumping out of the saddle, she put her arm through the reins, and knelt down by him. "Oh, Mr. Anderson! I fear you're hurt. I am so sorry. Oh speak to me, do speak; Oh, Harry, Harry! Whatever shall I do?" said she, seeing Harry's white face, and his

still-closed eyes. "Oh Harry! can't you speak?" She got up suddenly, made fast the reins, and loosed her horse; and then she knelt again by Anderson, and put her arms round him, and raised him up, his head upon her knee.

"Dear Harry, speak! Oh, can't you speak to me, my dear, dear Harry?" and as the tears came trickling down her cheeks, impulsive Nelly kissed him. But it was some time before he did speak; and when he did, he drew her down to him, and pressed her lips, and she returned it; rejoiced to find he was not really dead.

Harry was not hurt, however, so much as Nelly thought he was—he was merely stunned for a few minutes; but the situation in which he found himself on coming-to, must be his excuse for not reviving too rapidly. When you are really fond of a nice girl, but are in doubt if your attachment will be recipro-

cated, it certainly is pleasing to find, unexpectedly, that your fondest hopes are realised. So as they were all alone in the meadow, and the horses were safe, and communing together at the rails, Anderson was quite content to remain supported in Nelly's arms until he was "quite sure and certain" he should be able to stand; when with a kiss from him for her kindness, and a kiss from her for "living," she helped him up, got over the rails, patted his horse and tied the reins. Then holding Saucy Boy with one hand, Harry with the other caught the horse as he jumped; Gay Lad leading over the rails, steadily, when Nelly touched him.

They took their time returning, and did not specify what made them late. Their dreams that night were pleasant ones.

CHAPTER XI.

WOODLAND PLEASURES.—LOVE'S CONFESSION.

MR. CHARLES HAMILTON, of Bickley, the elder brother of John Hamilton, of Eymor, was a widower, whose wife had been dead many years—the two brothers married two sisters, Emma and Ellen Maynard. Charles had two children, Fred and Annie. Fred, who was twenty-one, had been three years on the farm, and he now assisted his father in the management of it; and Annie, who was eighteen, and who had but recently left school, filled up her time at home by teaching Rose Maberly—a nice girl of twelve, with

long, waved sunny hair, the only child of the buxom widow who kept house for Mr. Hamilton. She was the widow of a hunting friend.

Bickley was a hamlet in the Teme Valley, five miles from Eymor; and "The Manor House," an old half-timbered structure, where Charles Hamilton lived, was roomy, odd-cornered, and picturesque. It was situated on a wooded knoll that overlooked the river; and there were high wooded hills at the back of it, and big woods in the front of it—woods which stretched along the hills on the other side of the water for many miles. Westward the view was terminated by the magnificent range of the Welsh hills, and eastward by the Cotswolds; and the bold outline of the Malverns rose grandly in mid-distance. The country up there—a hop and apple district—was precisely of the same character as the neighbourhood of Eymor—a charming valley

between high wooded hills; with a river—the Teme—twisting and winding by hop-yards, orchards, and flat sunny meadows, where white-faced Herefords were often feeding.

At the extremity of the parish, four miles beyond the Manor House, the scenery began to assume a bolder character, and prepared the tourist for the cliffs, big boulders, and rocky gorges, that form so prominent a feature as you get higher up the valley; and which, becoming bolder and more massive as you go further westward, terminate in the mountainous hills of Wales; and it was at this spot, where the Bickley hills turned abruptly above a bend in the river, that one of the finest views was to be found; as there, the whole valley widened, and you looked up through a succession of gorges, each one higher than the other, to the massive hills in the distance, which boldly cut the sky, and closed the view.

On the turn of the hills on the Bickley side was a pine wood—a picnic place—where seats were placed at the best points for visitors; for the beauty of the different views, as seen between the trunks of the trees when the sun was setting, was a thing to be remembered. The hills deep purple, all the rest aglow, with lengthening shadows coming creeping to you; and then, all in the valley hidden under grey, all but the tree-tops, whose red stems blazed awhile, and then died out.

It was through this pine wood that Anderson and Nelly rode on their return from hunting; and as they turned at the bend to have a look up the valley, a rain-cloud in the distance swept the hills, and gave bold grey shadows and some fitful lights, that brought out some points and obscured others; and made Harry long to come there some day with his painting traps. After tea, before they left for Eymor, this view was mentioned; when

Mr. Hamilton said the best thing that Anderson could do, would be to make a week with him up there; and then he could explore the neighbourhood at his leisure, and paint what he liked; and that if he would come up at once, it would suit him as well as any time, and he and Fred could have some shooting together.

But as Anderson had already arranged to devote as much time as he could in the ensuing week to Nelly, by painting with her about her own home, he had to decline for the present; but when "Uncle Charles" fixed a thing, he liked it carried out, if practicable, so he said, "Look here, Nelly, my girl, then I'll tell you what you do. When you go home, say to John, from me, that you are to come up here and have your lessons, and I'll superintend them; and while Mr. Arundell is out in the turnips with Fred, you will be company for Annie. We

will take care of you, tell him; and your being here will I hope be some inducement to him to ride up and see us. Now you say what I tell you; I'll see to the painting; and try to come to-morrow, to stay a week, or longer if you like. Mr. Anderson, you try your persuasion as well, will you, at Eymor? and remember I shall count upon you; and if you are not both here with all the traps by this time to-morrow, I shall send Brooks with the dog-cart for the pair of you. Frank, you don't want an invitation. Come, my lad, when you like. We can always find you some birds, and some pheasants to blaze at, and a hearty welcome. Mrs. Maberly, the two spare rooms will be wanted to-morrow for these artists."

"I think, Mr. Hamilton," said Harry, "if we do come, that I must ask Mrs. Maberly, for the trouble we shall give her, to allow me to paint a little picture of her pretty

daughter. I should be very pleased indeed to make a sketch of her. I don't know when I have seen such a charming child." So, as the respective parents of Miss Nelly saw no objection to this very nice arrangement, she and Anderson went up in the Rectory carriage, next evening, to the Manor House.

You could see there was good fare to be had there; for, large as the rooms were, the kitchen was the largest; and it was well furnished too, with well-cured hams and good thick sides of bacon; and it was suitably set off with bright pewter and blue delf. You could also tell, by the belongings there, that the owner was a shot and a horseman, for there were boots and spurs and guns; and that he was a farmer, for there was farm-tackle there on hooks for all emergencies; and a sheep-farmer, for there were shears; and that old customs were

kept up there, for a great bough of misletoe still hung from the ceiling, opposite an old cuckoo-clock, that showed the quarters as the moon went round.

And when you came to look about you there, you had decided testimony, too, that he was a sportsman; for in the hall were many whips and brushes, a hunting cap, a fox's head, and antlers; and in the dining-room, some hunting pictures, "Drawn Blank," "the Melton Meet," "the Bedale Hunt," and—that farmer's picture, Herring's good "Farm Yard." The little smoking-room, too, showed the same, for rods and fishing-tackle filled the corners, and round the walls you went "from find to finish," ten coloured ones by Alken.

And besides the dogs in the kennels, and the horses in the stables, there were some first-rate greyhounds; for Charles Hamilton was well-known in coursing circles; and he had been, in his day, the owner of many prize-dogs, who

had been winners for him at Liverpool and other good places, and also at two of the local meetings, Holt and Cotheridge. The annual meetings too, in his own meadows, were always well attended; not only for the certainty of good sport, but because all those who went there were sure of genial hospitality and good fare. He was a much shorter man than his brother John, thick-set, and grey and ruddy; but he had the same characteristics—good humour and jollity; and he was never so happy as when, with a lot of his brother coursers round him in that snug old dining-room, he talked "shop" with the lot of them; and descanted in glowing terms on wrenches, stretches, turns, points, and exchanges; and made much of dog-language. Fred was a smart young fellow, and as tall as Frank; and Annie, who was eighteen, and who followed her mother as to height, was also tall and

well-built—a sunny merry girl, whom to know was to like. She and her cousin Nelly were great friends, and they had their little confidences, for they were in many respects alike.

The first thing the next morning after their arrival, Nelly, as a matter of course, went off to the stables, to pet Annie's pony, talk to the horses, and to expostulate with the cob on his ungovernable determination never to belie his name. When she was at Bickley she always wanted to ride him, "just, you know, uncle, to see if I can manage him;" any difficulty as to the pulling propensities of the animal, or the practicability of the fences, having invariably a decided charm for Nelly. She had, however, been always put off with "your hands are good enough I know, Nell, but you lack the muscle, my girl; that brute, Tearaway would pull your arms off!"

But Nelly's weakness was horses; and the more certain her uncle was that the cob would be too much for her, the more she wished to have a turn at him; and after breakfast, on the morning we name, the chance offered, for Fred and Harry and "the governor," went off shooting, and the men with them, as beaters; and Mrs. Maberly and Rose started to some cottages. The two madcap girls were therefore left alone, and they determined to improve the occasion; so, bent on mischief, they at once put down their sewing, fetched a skirt, and went to the stables.

"Has he ever had a lady on him?" said Nelly, as she proceeded to saddle the cob, and pressed her knee into him, to try to get the girths together—no easy task with the shorter ones of the side-saddle, as Tearaway was stout, and he was disinclined just then to bear his burden, or to have girls messing there about

him. "I don't know," said Annie; "but I don't think he has." "Then it is quite time," said she, "that he had that pleasure. Now then, his bridle. Aye, that ought to hold him—it's a hard-and-sharp, I see; but we shall soon know. Open your mouth, you stubborn little animal, and be thankful that a lady's hands are going to pilot you. You think I never put a bridle on before, don't you? Comb his tail out, Annie, while I do his mane, for we have no time to lose. There, I think, young gentleman, that will do for you, as we are only going to the meadow. Now for the rigging; help me on with it, will you?" and Nelly, throwing the end of her skirt over her arm, led out the animal.

"Where do you think he'll make for if he bolts or throws me?" "To the stables, undoubtedly," was the reply, "to finish his corn." "Then I'll tell you what you do, Annie," said Nelly, as she mounted, and flipped a fly

off his ear, and went through the gate to the meadow; "you stay here; and then, if he puts me off, you can catch him. What is his first performance?" "It depends on the mood he is in; but he generally bolts first, and then stands still and kicks, and buck-jumps." "What fun!" said Nelly. "He will send me flying at first, perhaps; but don't you squeal. You will see I'll manage him." "Very well," said Annie, who cared as little for a fall as Nelly; "but don't come off if you can help it."

They were now in the meadow, the cob shaking his head, and switching his tail about, for it was not the sort of saddle he had been used to. "Sit well back, Nell," said Annie, "he means kicking. Now off with you, and if, as Fred says, you 'come to grief,' I'll pick you up. Give him a good one while you have the chance of it." "I will," said Nelly; and touching him with

her heel, the cob went off at speed, took the bit in his teeth, got his head down, and bolted for the brook—and cleared it; and Nelly stuck him; when, pulling him up with difficulty, she turned him at it again; and, in spite of persistent denials on his part, she made him go over it.

Thus foiled in his intentions, he tried kicking; and that not answering his purpose, he began to buck-jump, and threw her. "Catch him, Annie!" cried Nelly, who was no sooner down than she was up again; "it's all right—I shall get another or two yet. He's worth riding." Mounted again, the cob declined to go. "Oh, very well, young gentleman, you want the whip, do you? I shall tickle you up a bit if I have any nonsense. Come on, sir!" But the cob put his head between his legs, kicked up, and again buck-jumped, and threw her a second time. "Number two!"

said Annie, laughing, as she held on to the animal, and Nelly got up again. "Will you have another turn?" "Will I?" said Nelly, "I should think so indeed. Catch hold of his ear while I mount him. Hold on a bit, Annie, till I feel my seat. Are the girths all right?" "Yes, they are," said Annie, looking. "Then loose him!" was the reply; and laying on to him with the whip, she and Tearaway were soon in full career. All that cob knew in the art of flinging, he put in practice; but as his rider was quite as determined to stick him as he was to throw her, and coached him up each time he tried to stop and buck-jump, his efforts were useless; and she not only stuck to him, but raced him and jumped him.

"Bravo! that's one to me," said she, as she brought him up to the gate again, and jumped off him, "When I make up my

mind to do a thing, I generally do it. Good gracious! how hot he is! However shall we get him dry again?" "Oh, fast enough," said Annie, "you work at his ears while I bat him over; and then you can wisp one side while I wisp the other. Get his ears dry and he will soon cool down." So these impulsive young ladies proceeded to do groom's work; a very dreadful state of things no doubt, and decidedly unconventional; but as neither of them troubled herself as to "the proprieties," they saw no harm in a bit of healthy exercise. Just as they had finished him to their mutual satisfaction, and all was in its place again, the skirt transferred from over to under, to get it out of sight, and the dirt brushed off Nelly, the shooting party returned.

"Well, young ladies!" said Mr. Hamilton, "and what are you after?" "We have been patting the cob," said Nelly,

which was the truth, if not the whole of it. "Oh, he is there then, is he?" said her uncle. "I was just going to see, for I thought some of you had left the door open, and he had slipped his halter. He does that trick sometimes, and opens the gate and gets off. Where's the colt, Brooks?" "In the loose-box, sir," said he; "at least, I left him there." "Just look will you; and see also if the others are safe." "They are all there, sir," said the groom, returning. "Then it's that confounded colt of the parson's. Call round, will you, and tell his man that the colt has been into my meadow; and that he has galloped all over it, and cut the turf up." Said Brooks, "I will sir;" and the two merry girls hurried on into the house, lest their laughter betrayed them. They had a walk with Anderson in the afternoon, and a pleasant evening afterwards; and the next morning,

he and Nelly went up into the wood to sketch.

The wood lay upon the slope of the hill, behind the house, and it was a steep wood; and there was an opening there where timber had been hauled, and the crushed ferns that were about it—crushed in their autumn loveliness—gave such a glorious path of colour, that, steep as it was, they toiled up it for the beauty of it. Those who have never noticed crushed ferns in the autumn should do so when they have the chance of it; they will remember then what "blended" colours mean. On reaching the ride at the top, they sat down there to rest awhile, under a yew tree with a thick black backing. Tall ferns were there in all their autumn glory, deep in a carpeting of russet leaves; and the varied tints on them, and upon the surrounding foliage, were most charming. And as they sat there—where the ride was foot-thick in moss, and dense shade

round them—looking over the leaf-strewn banks to the blue hills in the distance, that showed between the massive grey tree-trunks, Nelly's enthusiasm was awakened; for the trees were in shadow, and the fern-clumps in front of them golden, for the sun shone full there. "Oh, this indeed is beautiful!" said she. "Now don't you think so, Mr. Anderson?" "'Mr.' Anderson! Now, Nelly, three days ago it was 'Harry.' I think 'dear Harry.'" But Nelly blushed, and hung her head in silence. "I must try if I can't get another fall." "But I could not," pleaded Nelly, "help it then; indeed I could not. You seemed so badly hurt, and—and I really thought you were, and I felt so sorry——" "Because you liked me, Nell; was that the reason?" "Oh, you know I like you, for you have been so kind." "Have I? But you don't know why, Nelly. Shall I tell you a little secret?" said he, as he let his arm fall

lightly round her waist. "Oh, please don't do that!" said she, as she gently removed it." "I won't if you wish it; but—well, you see, my dear girl, you set me the example." "Nay, that is cruel," said Nelly; "but I could not help it—I really could not. Oh, I wish I had not done so!" "Why? If you like me, if you love me, Nelly—I know what you would say; but had you not loved, your lips had not pressed mine." "But I thought —I did indeed—that you were dying. It was such a dreadful fall!" and a little tear-drop showed in Nelly's eye. "A lucky fall for me—it saved me waiting; waiting for the love I hoped some day to gain. Come, Nelly, the ice is broken now; so don't deny me, for I love you dearly:" and his arm again stole gently round her waist—and stayed there. "I liked you when I saw you in the wood, have liked you since; and meant to win you, if I could, by kindness; a selfish kindness, too,

that bringing out your genuine love of art, should give to me all I could wish in you when my dear wife."

"Oh, Harry! I am not worthy—not fitted for your wife. You are so clever, I——oh, I must not think of it, must not indeed." "You must, my darling! I'll wait for years, if you will but have me. With tastes alike, you would so cheer me on. I feel that then, with you, love, ever with me, I could make my way, and win a name in time. Say, Nelly, say that I may wait and hope!" "But my home's so happy, and I am so young! I could not part from them, and leave my people. Oh, don't you ask me. We can still be friends—we will be." "Yes, friends for life, Nell; friends beneath one roof, as man and wife. You know you love me!"

"Yes, Harry, I do indeed; I never loved before, but I do love you!" "Then I'll

hope on. I'll wait till summer, Nell. If then you say the same, I'll make my love known, and will ask your father. Kiss me, my darling! You have made me happy."

They remained at Bickley for a week—the pleasantest week that she had ever spent; for they were daily in the woods together painting, and talking—as only engaged people do talk—of that happy future that now seemed before them. But it was almost like a dream to her; so uneventful had her whole life been, so little had she looked beyond the present, the even tenor of her happy life—the household duties, daily visitings, the pretty country and the cottagers. He had promised she should often come back home, to see them all, and gossip with the people; but she could not think how she should bear the absence, so wound up with her life was all around there. One thing was certain: she would strive her best

in Art, now—for his sake—to understand him when she watched him working, to take an interest in all he did—to gain that knowledge that should please him daily.

They were bright days for Nelly, while Harry stayed at Eymor; and her friend Clara became her confidant. He remained at the Rectory till December, sketching, painting—he made a charming picture of Rose Maberly—shooting, and rambling, and with an occasional day with hounds; until, so much did the Hamiltons see of him, that he at last seemed like one of the family; and he and Frank were firmer friends than ever. But nothing was known in Nelly's family of her own engagement.

Before leaving Town, Anderson had promised Jessie that he would sketch Landimoor for her, and also, if he could, her brother George. One day when he was down there—the old man kept his bed—Lawson, in

handing him his folio, turned it upside down, and out fell sundry sketches. He picked them up again, and put them in. At one he started! "Good gracious, sir!" said he, "why, that's our Jessie!" "What?" said Harry, as he coloured up with confusion, for he had forgotten it was there, "why, that's Barbara Lovell, the Gipsy Beauty; I sketched her for a picture." "I could have sworn it was my sister!" young George said.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SKETCH.—THE HUNT BALL AND THE PROMISE.

THAT unexpected appearance of the sketch of "The Gipsy Beauty," was as embarrassing to Anderson as it was unfortunate for Lawson, for its likeness to George's sister was unmistakable. It was one of several studies which had been made of Jessie's face, prior to the painting of the picture, and it had got mixed up accidentally with some other sketches; for until the contents of the folio were tumbled out upon the floor, Anderson was unaware that it was there.

The startling likeness of this handsome

gipsy to his own sister, and the knowledge that Lewis was himself with gipsies, set up at once such a train of thought in Lawson's mind, that Harry had to encounter some very close questioning, as to where and when he had sketched "that gipsy girl;" and the reply of "Oh, many miles from here, and long ago," did not lessen George's anxiety, or his determination to be "revenged" on Lewis.

That Jessie was dead, he had never for a moment doubted; but was it not possible, he asked himself, that in the years that had elapsed since she left her home, she had been so pestered by him, that she might at last have married him? If so, then more than ever must he have been the cause of her untimely end; for she would never have left him, and come home in that way—alone, and at midnight—but for some brutal treatment on his part.

The more he thought of it, the more feasible did such a supposition seem to him; and bitterly did he regret foregoing his revenge when he had the chance of it, on that night when Lewis was in his power. He said then that the next time should "settle it," and it should settle it, let the result to him be what it may; and George told his story to Anderson. Harry's suggestion, however, that, in the absence of positive proof, his sister might still be living, could not be listened to for a moment. There was her handkerchief, George said, and no soul had seen her. "She's drowned, sir, drowned! that's what she is, poor girl, and he's the cause of it."

It was awkward for the painter; for, as he saw a possibility of Jessie returning home, sooner or later, his own connection with her might now come out, and explanation would not be easy. All he could do now, how-

ever, was—in reply to Lawson's repeated entreaties, that he would give him the sketch —to promise that he would bring him "a copy of it" when next he came to Eymor; for, although the sketch was of no use to him, Anderson did not think it prudent then to leave it; and when the Hamiltons saw it, he treated the singular likeness of the gipsy girl to Jessie, simply as an odd coincidence, and the name he did not mention.

But the occurrence made him uneasy, and when he left Eymor he ceased to urge Jessie to return to Landimoor. He made the sketch of the house into a picture for her, with her brother at the door, and gave it her, and told her what George said.

Frank, when he heard of it, could do nothing; for to tell George she was not the wife of Lewis, was to tell him how he heard it, and also that she was, in all probability, still living; and it was better, he thought,

to let it be as it was, than to make bad worse. He had no idea that Harry could enlighten him.

The result of the matter to Lawson, however, was this, that his sole thought now was how to get at Lewis; and a good deal of his time was spent in riding about the country to visit gipsy camps. But the gipsies he met with would not own to knowing him, though George tried every wile, and he now watched regularly with Moss, the keeper; not, however, with the idea of catching Lewis, for he did not think he would again come there, but with the hope that he might lay hold of some gipsy fellow who knew him, and who would give him the desired information for the sake of getting off; but Christmas came and Christmas went, and Lawson still was watching—without result.

The old year was out, and the new one

in, and the time was now mid-winter. The season had been a mild one, unusually so, for the previous winter was severe; and the snow, which for the past few weeks had lain but lightly, was going day by day, and the signs of the coming spring were increasing. The children were rambling in the Eymor woods, and hunting in the copses, for the catkins were on the hazels, and early primroses were to be found for searching. The rooks were pairing in the elms, and the partridges in the stubbles; and the presence of Aaron in the meadows told that the moles were busy. The gorse on the common had its golden blossoms, and a few stray bees were about them, and snow-drops were in the orchards. The thrushes were heard again in the Green Valley, and the woodlarks' songs were frequent; and there was a cooing in the woods by day, and a hooting of owls by night. The buds on the

trees were swelling, for the sap was rising, and browns and purples deepened visibly. Farm work was forward.

The winter had been an open one, so Frank and Nelly had each had their share of hunting; and as their aunts, true to their promise, had been down from Town, and had spent a month with them, the time at Eymor House had passed most pleasantly. The sheep this time were safe, for as the bank was strengthened it withstood the flood, the only one they had, just after Christmas; so Captain's services were not required, nor young Tom's either. Old Minchen, therefore, was a growl the less on that score, though he made up for it on the "too mild" winter; concerning which he had a deal to say in dismal prophecies. But as Mr. Hamilton only laughed at him each time he talked about it, and said how beneficial it had been to the poor, and in many respects to themselves, "Jemmy" was obliged

to fall back on his old stock phrase of "such wonderful nerve and spirits."

His amiable sisters—the maidens Minchem—got on better, however, for through George Lawson's indiscreet tongue they had heard of the picture of the gipsy girl, and its startling likeness to Jessie; and they had continued to call at Landimoor on the strength of the old man's malady, until they had obtained full particulars, including the remark of Anderson that she might "still" be living. Now these maidens Minchem had lively imaginations, and as they were well up in that mental arithmetic that, with scandal for its basis, makes one and one two, the result to them was peculiarly edifying; and they soon made, to their own satisfaction, a very nice bit of mystery of it; which, when duly piled up in "the scandal parlour" at the Hawthorns, was deliberately set going, and assiduously kept up, in every house where they could get

a footing; always, however, with the careful proviso of "not breathing a word to Lawson" about what "they thought;" which, considering the state of that young man's temper, was just as well, especially as he never failed to speak his mind when people asked for it.

"Peculiarly shocking, Gelina!" said Tabitha, "if it should be so, and the young man so respectable. Oh, I felt from the first there was something wrong about him." "Decidedly," said Angelina. "Evidently one of the depraved; a lost sheep, Tabby; he herds with the goats in the broad road that his uncle tells us of. It's melancholy, Tab! What is the world coming to?" "Destruction," responded Tabitha; "destruction!"

The unfortunate artist had been encountered by them in the wood, while he was painting; and Tabitha's persistent repetition of her two sniffs and a wink, each time he

looked at her, was too much for him, and he could not help smiling; especially as her sister looked at him so boldly, and continued to make such sarcastic remarks about his picture, that he thought he must alter it on the spot, then and there. That smile settled him. Their story gained as it went, in detail, but lessened in credence, for people knew them; and they fared worse with the Hamiltons than they did with most people, as they only laughed at them for the extreme absurdity of such a supposition; and Miss Nelly, who had her own private reasons for treating them "very rudely, very rudely indeed, my dear!" behaved to them in so marked a manner, that the gasp, and the push back, and the sniffs, and the winks, were more pronounced than ever.

But as a slender basis was always sufficient with them for a good superstructure, the "good talking to" that spirited Nelly

gave them each time they returned to the charge, sufficed to link her name with Anderson's, and materially added to the interest of the story; and they resolved that when next he came to the Rectory, they would watch them closely. The more so as Nelly was again with her brother at the Hunt Ball, and he, Anderson, was there too; for some worldly-minded friends of theirs, who were also there, had seen him; and had, moreover, noticed and commented on the way in which he was "carrying on" with her, and that he took her in to supper.

That was a happy night for Nelly; happier than when, twelvemonths ago, they sat amongst the flowers, away from all the dancers and the heat; for now, her liking for him had been changed to love, and he returned it; and that little scheme of his was bearing fruit. For the aunts, to whom he had, since June, so frequently represented

how beneficial it would be to Miss Hamilton could her Art studies be furthered in Town—had already obtained a promise from her father and mother, that her usual stay of three weeks in the summer with them at Bayswater, should next time be extended to three months; in order that she might thereby benefit by their nearness to South Kensington. Hence, views of joyful days, in painting side by side, made those engaged young people very happy; and as the palms on that night were as spread out as ever, and the shrubs as plentiful—in that dim conservatory of pleasant memories—their vows were able to be "sealed," and the pang of parting lessened.

Still, nothing but the absolute necessity of sticking close to work at his Academy pictures, to get them done in time, prevented Anderson from finding an excuse for again visiting Eymor, as the time spent with the

Hamiltons had passed delightfully; as, in addition to the chief attraction, there had been the minor ones of hunting and shooting; for he was a fair rider and a good shot, and they had had famous sport in the covers.

"My governor," said Frank, when they chatted that night about it, "is one of the old sort, you know, who likes his brace of well-bred dogs; and who loves to see them ranging and quartering, and working to hand and steady; and dropping instantly to gun, and fur, and feather. He likes a later hour too, to start, than most men, so it suits you townspeople; not that he is a late man by any means, but simply because he finds better sport in the morning after breakfast, than he does before it. And still better in the afternoon, when, by turning out about four o'clock, when the birds are on the feed, and the scent is rising, he seldom has a turn

in the stubbles for nothing, as you know, Harry; or for the matter of that, in the turnips either; as he takes them slowly, and has a way also, as you saw, of cross-cutting the drills, instead of working down them, so the birds don't spy him. A knowing old boy is the governor!"

"We have had some famous sport too, at the pheasants lately; for since the snow has been down, we have been able to stay longer in the dark plantations. You must try next Christmas if you can't be with us." "I will," said Harry; adding mentally, "and as Nell's acknowledged suitor then, I hope."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE RACE, THE QUARRY, AND THE LEAP FOR LIFE.

EVENTS in the parish had been much as usual, and the old year had not terminated without the customary observances. The belfry people were very merry, and the carol-singers, too, had a good time of it; and the bells on New Year's Eve rang out as lustily as when poor Jessie lay there in the snow. To two people only was the joyous sound a sad one—to George and Mrs. Lawson—the old man, almost childish, did not heed it.

Things had gone on pretty well with most of the people, but the girl, Betsy, was still under a cloud, and old Joe chuckled at it. "It be a roightin on hur, sur, fur a sarvin o' them hout i' that awaay o' that midnight job, sur. Her put-ted the nuts tagither, hur did, o' Nutcrack noight, a hopin they'd burn; but it wanna no goo, it wanna, fur they bosted, an jump-ed, an flewd, is 'em did; so theer wanna gwain ta be no luck, nor nothin, in hur lovin, no theer wanna. It wan the noight—the thirty-fust sur, o' October—as young Tom wan a cotchin at thun opples, as wan a swingin, ooth his ands a toied behind 'm; an the young limb bit-ted thray on 'em, a did, an niver got his ool singed oonst be the candle. Look at that neow! Darn him, sur, fur a clever un. But theer, Batsy didna goo at it roight, hur didna."

"How was that?" said Frank, to whom

Joe confided it. "Well sur, it be this awaay. Hur shoon ha' naamed the nuts—two on 'em—hursen, an the mon hur waanted; an ha' sid ef they'd laaid clouse thin, or jump-ed. Ef two on 'em as be naamed, laays clouse, the mon putts hup wi' thun ooman, fur he's boun ta hev hur; an ef they dussent a don't; but a ruckin 'em ony, don't count; it be nohow."

"How did the cook fare, Joe;" said Frank, who had heard somewhat of these "spells" before. "Hur dayn't trust the nuts, sur," said Joe, "hur'd troied 'em, toime past an oover; so hur eated hur opple afore the glass, an hur comb-ed hur ar the whoile, is hur did; but theer wanna nobody peep-ed oover hur shouder, no theer wanna. So whin the nixt toime cooms, sur, hur bin agwain ta troy thun hemp-sid, an see how that'll act; they saay it be sure, surer than the dishes."

"Indeed. Well," said Frank, anxious to change the conversation, "we have had a nice mild winter, Joe, and, so far, our full share of hunting." "Is, us han, sur; but a knowd us shoon, ecos theer wan more foire i' the skoy, sur, thisatoime—them stars as shoots an busties, an floys aboot loike whin the fogs coome." "And that's a sign, is it, Joe?" "Sartin, sur, an a moild winter's sure. But thin it conna be hoff it, no it conna. Wi' all that theer foire a cuttin aboot o' noights, it gits ta hot up theer fur the raain ta froze, an so us haves it natral —mostly that be, sur, mostly; as the corners o' the littler clouds inna hotted so much; so atoimes they frozes. Yer sis, sur?" "Perfectly," said Frank.

"Uz studied them things a dale, sur, a has, an a waatches 'the Waggin an Osses,' reglar—a good team, sur, four on 'em, an the waggin parfect." "You do, eh Joe; and

what do you think of comets?" "Commuts, sur? A don't hold good ooth 'em, I don't nohow; theym horful terrifyin, an they passes knowledge." "And the aurora—those northern lights, you know, Joe?" "Oh, a con ricken them up a good un, I can; theym wars an rumours o' wars, sur, as we reads on i' the Scriptures. A loikes ta see them, I do; ecos a knows thin somebody's abein hammered as waants it." "Why you pugnacious old fellow!" said Frank, "you ought to think differently at your age." "Oh, uz hammered a lot, an leathered 'em too, i' moi toime, sur; a lot, a has. A could alleys use ma fisties whin a young un; a loiked a foight, a did, it waarmed ma blood, an did ma a power o' good. A alleys falt better, sur, a dale, a did, arter a good hup an down, an a towslin. It maaide ma more appy loike, an continted o' ma moind, it did."

"Well, your fighting days are over now, that's one comfort. Who put Peterkin through his paces?" "Tom, sur," said Joe. "Heen gotten'm ta roights now, he han; un'l croy 'Tally O' loike a Christin. It doeth ma good, sur, ta hear'm." "Does it?" said Frank; "but he mixes it up too much, Joe, and says, 'Got the brush, Tally O,' when I have been thrown out, and 'Had a purl—down again!' when I've stuck tight." "Sure, sur? Ah, look at that neow! A sposes a loikes ta tell all a knows at oonst, sur, ta show he emembers it. A bin a good bird though, he be, an uz gittin batter mannered; a don't blasphame sa much as a did, boy a score o' Sundays. But them pickers spoiled 'm, a did. Uz a gittin hon batter too, sur, wi' the ship. Theyn coome tagither neow, sur, an let 'm alone a bit. 'Flood' be agittin on too, sur, a good un. A gid'm some

misletoe, a did, as it be lucky, an it maakes him halthy."

Frank had given Joe a drink of "lambs'-wool" on New Year's night—ale, toast, and nutmeg, and roasted apples—and the sheep reminded him of it. "That wan purty tipple, that wan, sur," said he, "an a wish all lambs an ship, too, had ool loike it, an ud the shorin on um, be a rousin foire, loike us had at our faaste o' Christmas noight; thanks be ta clane ands, sur, as 'twan loighted ooth. A Christmas foire oona tind nohow, ef so be as thun ands be dirty; that's wery sure an sartin, that be, orl the world oover."

Aaron, the mole-man, when he called on Frank about "the runs i' the meddir," had got his say too, as to his having "threwd some cy-der o' the roots o' thun opple trees in his garding, o' Twelfth Daay, ta maake em bar the batter." He and Jim had had a great pig-killing, for the five joint ones, fattened on

the "ac-orns," had been duly slaughtered; ham and bacon being much in demand in the season for the gipsy parties; Mary and Rebecca being good hands at "curing." And Mary's chickens, none the worse for the beech-mast, had been sold at market at good prices, and there were lots coming on for the parties.

Aaron's belief in himself, too, as being superior to the doctor, was in nowise lessened by an increased list of cures, which he took care to particularise, whenever he had the chance of it. Price's brother was better—the elder-tea had opened the pores, and the willow-tea had strengthened him. Mrs. Gould's lad too—the lime-blossom had cured his cough, and he was hoping to get another; as some winterpick wine was left, and he liked it "moightily." And her old father, he also was on the mend, for the juniper had reduced the "swalth;" and Betsy's

toothache had been eased by the yellow-flag, and the sundew had lessened her freckles; and Mrs. Austin's boy, Johnny, was better of the nose-bleeding, through taking the nettle-juice; and her sister's "poor leg," and her wen, had been respectively improved by the agrimony and the stonecrop. In short, the list of cures in Eymor, Bickley, and Upperton, was a long one, too long for detail; so Aaron, the Medico, maintained his position in the parishes, as he took care to mention to all present on Plough Monday; when the ploughmen of the district and their friends dined together as usual, in the long room of "The Crowing Cock," at Upperton; host Gill presiding.

Jem, the fisherman, was in force also on that occasion.— for the two cronies were seldom separate — and he named amongst other things to his own credit—as he liked to get his due—that Sheba Tunstall, the girl

at the inn, who was heaved at Easter to stay her breakage, had fasted on St. Agnes' Eve at his suggestion, and all that day besides, to "strangthin" it; "and now she had proved it," said Jem, "as the gals do as gits no walentoines, an as a telda. Hur spell-ed some naames o' some bits o' paaper, an rould 'em hup i' clay, and putted 'em i' the waater; as the fust as bin uppist o' the top o' the paail's the mon; an it wan the roight un. So as that theer wan two toimes, twoice oover, so ta saay it, mayhap an mebbe, an God sind it, hur'll hev'm. An ma the Lord suffer it, an allow the mon ta loike hur; as ool be a comfort, an a settlin on hur, an a maakin on hur continted an appy loike. Though," said Jem, "it be raythor a risky spell for them theer gals, ecos whosomiver comes toppermost, the lass be boun ta hev 'm—good lookin or bad lookin, squint or nun, laame or goo asy. But as thun oud

ooman said, as had got the cripple, 'batter a one-leg'd un, than nerrun.'"

Young Bob's holidays were luckily at an end, and he was safe at school again; much to the relief of his own household, and also of the farm-hack and the pony; the equestrian exploits of the youth having been many and daring. Still he had been, on the whole, better behaved, and his sister had hopes of him. But his contempt for those who were less energetic than himself, was still as great as ever; as was apparent, indeed, when the Rev. Martin Murray spent a day there, and brought his son with him; a very "proper" boy, and just fifteen—so proper, in fact, that it had never been possible for him to get into mischief, as he had not enough about him.

"Pa," said Bob, when he left, "that lad's a fool!" "Bob!" said his father. "Well,

so he is, pa—he can't fight or ride, for I asked him; and he's never been a rabbitin, or put a ferret in a hole, or set a wire; nor been up in a tree, pa; and he says it's wrong to shout, and it's silly to run! What do you think of that? I know what old Joe would say to it; he'd say, 'Look at that neow!' I know I wouldn't grow up such 'a cake' for all the world; why he doesn't even know how to hammer a fellow; and what do you think he said? he said he saw 'the dogs' a-huntin'! They arn't 'dogs' pa," said Bob, indignantly, "they're hounds." "That's right enough, Bob," said his father, "but you see he has been brought up properly, and is above such fighting ways; he is not like you are." "No," said Bob, "he isn't, pa, for he hasn't got it in him. If that's proper, I hope I shan't be brought up properly, that's what I

do. If he can't fight when they cheek him, he's no good, pa." "Muscle" evidently was still in the ascendant.

Nelly was as busy as ever in the parish, and the juveniles and the old people had been again thought of, as the time came round. One pale face was still amongst them, though thinning day by day—poor little Bessie, who still lingered on, but who could not last much longer. Frank was as active as ever, but of late he had had rather a bad time of it; his frequent visits to the Rectory on "parish" matters, in his capacity of churchwarden, giving his sister Nelly abundant opportunities for teasing him about her friend Clara, "the fair parishioner."

It was now the end of February, and George Lawson, who had been from home for a week with friends at Cornsall, returned; and the state of mind in which that young man did return, was rather different to what

it was when he set out—and this was the cause of it.

The morning of his last day there, the hounds met at Island Pool, and went away for Hurcot. George was with them, as his friend Sproston, with whom he had been staying, had offered him a mount. "If you like to have a spin with them, George, I'll mount you," said he; "and you can take the train from Churchill, and leave the horse at the 'Swan'—they are sure to bear for that country—as my man is going after dinner with the cart to Hagley, and I can send Jack with him, to leave your traps at the station, and wait till you come, and so ride the horse home. And if you like to do so, it will suit me quite as well as driving you, and do the horse good. There is a fast train from there at 4.37, that will get you to Worcester time enough for the 5.40 to Bransford; and I dare say you could catch

it." "Yes," said George, "I could;" so he closed with the offer.

The country was new to him—in part, at least—and the fox was a straight one; so Lawson got thrown out. As he came trotting down from the Woodhouse, for Hurcot lane, a man on a blood screw passed along the bottom. "Hi! my man," cried Lawson, as he steadied for the gate, "which way have the hounds gone?" The fellow turned. "At last!" cried George; but before he could get the gate open, the spurs had been sent in, and the man was gone—'twas Lewis!

Down by the wood-side went George, and on by the Paper-Mill; and away up the bank for Hodge-Hill, where he caught sight of the enemy going at best pace; and he turned at the top, for the railway was in front of him. Lawson followed, and once in the open road, he had him in sight

of him, and was gaining on him; but at Park Hall, a carriage that was coming out from there, lost him ground; and as he rose the bank for the railway-bridge, Lewis —too prudent to chance the steep pitch for Blakedown, and so get hindered at the turnpike—was tearing up the turf for the New Wood, and he was well mounted; but so was George.

On went Lawson; past the wood, down the lane, over the pool-dam, and through the wickets; with Lewis, who turned up Hackman's Gate lane, still before him. But the loose sand there told on the horse that Lewis rode, and his pace was slacker; and as George got under the beeches, where the road dips down, he saw him reel and stagger; but the chance was lost, for his own horse slipped and fell.

Mounted again, and almost out of breath, George heard him clattering along the lane

for Broom, and followed. He was now on a good hard road again; and further on there was a wide turf border to it, along which he galloped as far as Rednall Farm, where he saw Lewis turning to the left for Harboro; and he turned too. Beside the road there, close down by the withies, were sundry tents and gipsies — a camping ground. Lewis, pointing backwards, shouted as he passed, and the men rushed up the bank, but George dashed through them, and raced him up the lane and round the common, the distance lessening. But at Staken Bridge, a waggon by the wheelwright's, moving on, lost George a minute, and Lewis got the lead for Iverley; looked back and spurred, then jumped the hedge, and vanished.

"I have him!" Lawson said; he knew now he could trap him, for once in the fields, jumping would have to be done, and his own

horse was a fencer; and the stagger that he saw Lewis's horse have in Hackman's Gate lane, showed that the steel was out of him. So taking a pull at his horse, George steadied him, took the fence quietly, and cantering up the slope, he saw his enemy picking the next place—a stiff one.

The shout George gave hastened him; but it was a near touch for a downer, and ground was gained. At the next fence he was still nearer to him; and at the next to that, but just six lengths behind him; and in the third field, he came up with him; and as Lewis turned his head in perfect terror, Lawson, who had dropped his whip, slipped the stirrup from the saddle, and pressing his knees well in, gave it one whirl round, and struck at him savagely.

Lewis ducked, and missed the blow, but his bay horse got it, and—hit on the neck

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